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The Brother * Middies

Arthur Lee Knight

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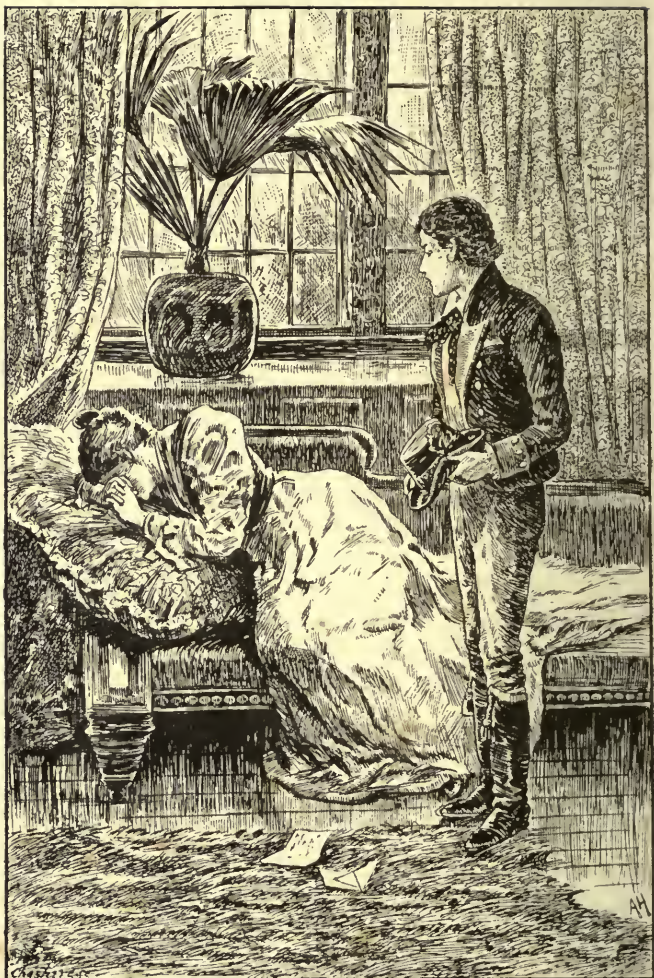
THE BROTHER-MIDDIES

AND

SLAVERS, AHOY!







For a moment Ernest stood irresolute.

Frontispiece.

THE BROTHER MIDDIES, page 15.

THE BROTHER-MIDDIES

AND

SLAVERS, AHOY!

BY

ARTHUR LEE KNIGHT

AUTHOR OF "ADVENTURES OF A MIDSHIPMITE," "THE RAJAH OF
MONKEY ISLAND," "THE CRUISE OF THE CORMORANT,"
"JACK TREVOR, R.N.," ETC. ETC.

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THE BROTHER-MIDDIES

CHAPTER I.

A FATEFUL LETTER.



OUR story opens early on a lovely autumnal morning in the year of grace 1812. The gentle mists which had lain brooding over the surface of the earth were being gradually dissipated by the warm rays of the revivifying sun, and like evanescent smoke curled up amongst the umbrageous oaks and mighty beeches, which in antique and picturesque groupings studded the old park of Hazeldene in all directions—causing them to look grotesque and huge through the medium of their vanishing, semi-transparent

vapours. The golden and ruddy tints of the fast decaying foliage were here and there intensified where the rays of the newly-risen orb of day, struggling through the filmy mist, shot athwart them; and sunlight and shadow lay in chequered patterns upon the mossy sward which carpeted the gentle undulations beneath the wide-spreading branches of the giant trees. Here and there the nimble rabbits issued from great tufts of brown and dying bracken, and gambolled about, or nibbled their breakfasts from the sweet dewy grass as fancy or inclination led them; the wood-pigeons softly cooed their morning orisons of praise amid the sheltering foliage overhead; and the pheasants shook their gaudy plumage in the lustre of the sunlight as they strutted about in search of a morning meal.

On the higher ground, near the old manor house of Hazeldene, the diaphanous veil, in which earth had enwrapped herself during the hours of darkness, very quickly melted away

into the serene and balmy air overhead ; but in the lower portion of the park, which was bounded by a tributary stream of considerable size, and where several large fish-ponds were situated, the dense vapours still hung motionless over the scene as if loth to depart—the rays of the sun being apparently unequal to the task of dissipating the sluggish inert curtain of fog, which latter effectually shut out a most charming view of Devonshire hills and valleys which lay beyond.

Hazeldene, the country seat of Sir Henry Durrant, Bart., was in a picturesque part of Devonshire not many miles westward of the old and “ever faithful” city of Exeter, and the property, which was an extensive one, had been in the family for many generations. Sir Henry was at the time of the opening of our story a hale and hearty middle-aged man, much addicted to field sports and all country pursuits, and owing to his kindly good-nature and open-handedness, much beloved by all the

country side. Lady Durrant was a charming lady, for whom every one had a good word, and was several years younger than her spouse. The family consisted only of two sons, both of whom, strangely enough, had chosen to follow the sea as their profession. Sir Henry and his wife had done all in their power to dissuade Hugh, the heir, from entering the navy, but the boy was impetuous and high-spirited, and overruled his parents' wishes in this respect — they not unnaturally having wished to bring him up as a country gentleman.

Ernest, the younger boy, whose acquaintance we are upon the point of making, was so devoted to his brother, and so distressed at the latter's going to sea, that he determined to follow his example, and serve in the same profession. As many of the Durrant family, whose portraits were suspended in the old oak-panelled hall, had distinguished themselves in this branch of their country's service in

bygone years, Sir Henry and his lady tried to reconcile themselves to the career their sailor sons had marked out for themselves, and many and fervent were the prayers offered up for their welfare in that stately but lonely home when the boys were far away upon the ocean wave, and the howling blasts were sweeping and shrieking around the massive old mansion. When the news of sea fights and desperate battles came tardily down into the west country—for in the year 1812 we were at it hammer-and-tongs with our old and irrepressible enemy Bonaparte, the scourge of Europe—how anxiously did these parents scan every detail of news that came to hand, with an unspoken prayer in their loving hearts that those nearest and dearest to them had escaped the deadly perils of fire and sword.

As good luck would have it, Hugh and Ernest were appointed to the same ship, the *Rosario*, when they first went to sea, and it

was whilst serving in this ship as midshipmen that they received their baptism of fire. And very proud they were of the circumstances, which, however, I am not going to recount here, merely stating that the *Rosario*, a sloop carrying eight 18-pounder carronades, and two long sixes, when cruising off Dieppe fell in with a flotilla of twelve French brigs and a lugger, all of which belonged to the 14th Division of the Boulogne flotilla. A spirited engagement ensued, with the result that three of the French vessels were captured and two driven on shore, the remainder succeeding in effecting an escape into Dieppe harbour.

To return to Hazeldene and its picturesque surroundings. If we move down the umbrageous old oak avenue, in the direction of the park gates, on the misty autumnal morning which I have already described, we shall probably meet Ernest Durrant returning from an early canter through the park. He will be alone, for his elder brother, Hugh, had been

ordered—on the *Rosario* being paid off—to join a line-of-battle ship in the Channel Fleet some two months previously, whilst Ernest had not been as yet reappointed, much to the joy and comfort of his devoted parents.

We hear the distant thud of a horse's feet, and glancing down through the line of hoary old trees, immediately catch sight of a handsome brown cob with a boy on his back galloping at full speed up the avenue in the direction of the house. As they pass at full gallop we have just time to note that Ernest Durrant, now about fourteen, has a bright engaging face, with the refined aristocratic-looking features which betoken his ancient and proud lineage. From the bright healthy colour mantling in his cheeks, and his exhilarated expression, I think we may safely conclude that his morning ride has been a very enjoyable one, in spite of its loneliness.

As Ernest drew rein at the front door, a window above the porch was thrown open,

and the genial face of Sir Henry Durrant was thrust out.

"I'm sorry you had to ride all alone this morning, my boy," he said, waving his hand to his son, "but I had a touch of rheumatism, and thought I had better keep out of the saddle."

"Oh! I had such a jolly spin, sir," answered Ernest, as he threw himself from his horse. "I went down over the park and across Furzeleigh Common. I was wishing all the time that you and Hugh were with me."

"Would that we had been!" exclaimed Sir Henry. "We are expecting to hear from Hugh that the admiral has granted him a fortnight's leave, so, perhaps, we shall all be together again before many days are over."

"That *will* be jolly!" said Ernest, with a bright look in his dark eyes. "I'll take Sultan round to the stable now, and then come in to breakfast."

"Tell the mater I'll be down in ten minutes,"

shouted Sir Henry, as his son walked away with the horse in the direction of the stables; "I've just got a letter to finish."

Having handed over Sultan to a groom, Ernest entered the house, and at once made his way to the dining-room in search of his mother. On opening the door he was surprised and pained to see Lady Durrant seated in an attitude of grief on a couch, in one of the old mullioned windows of the apartment, with her face buried in her hands, and her whole frame convulsed with sobs. On the floor near her feet lay a letter which she had evidently just been perusing.

For a moment Ernest stood irresolute, too astonished to make known his presence. Then with a chill feeling at his heart, which seemed like a presentiment of evil, he darted forward and threw his arms around his mother's neck.

"Mother, darling! what is the matter?" he whispered, in agitated tones; "has anything happened to Hugh?"

Lady Durrant, who had been too much absorbed in her grief to hear her son's approach, now started up, and with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and a look of misery in her handsome face, answered in almost inarticulate tones — "Poor Hugh has been dismissed from the service, and he says in his letter that we shall never see him again. How, oh! how, can we break such news to your father?"

Poor Ernest turned deadly pale, and all the light seemed to fade out of his eyes on hearing this startling and unexpected news. It could not be true! It must be some wicked hoax! What could his brave and handsome brother Hugh, to whom he had always looked up as to a sort of demigod — what could he have done to merit a disgraceful expulsion from the navy? These thoughts flashed through his mind like lightning.

"Mother, dear, it can't be true," he gasped. "Hugh could never have got into such a

scrape. Depend upon it there is some mistake !”

Lady Durrant recovered herself with a great effort, and after kissing Ernest affectionately on the forehead, stooped down and picked up the ill-fated letter. Without a word she placed it in her boy's hands and signed to him to read.

Ernest took the letter with a palpitating heart. It was clearly Hugh's handwriting, though the words seemed somewhat blurred and indistinct, as if written under the influence of strong emotion. With humid eyes Ernest managed with some difficulty to decipher what follows :—

“PORTSMOUTH, Oct. 15, 1812.

“MY OWN DARLING MOTHER, — What you will say when you hear that I have been cruelly dismissed from the service, I know not. I cannot explain my own feelings to you, for I feel like one demented. I cannot, I dare

not, write to my father about it. You must break the news to him as gently as you can, for I feel that I have brought disgrace upon the family name, and this thought makes me quite broken-hearted. My offence was merely a trivial one, and had it not been for the fact that my captain is a regular bully and hates midshipmen, I should have got off with a stoppage of leave, or something of that sort.

“Briefly, the facts were these: I went out for a ride upon the Portsdown hills one afternoon, and as I was cantering down a rather steep slope my horse tripped and fell, throwing me over his head. I was stunned and lay insensible for a long time, and as the accident had taken place in an unfrequented spot nobody came near me. When I recovered my senses I found, to my dismay, that the horse had bolted, and that I should have to tramp all the way back to Portsmouth unless I could hire some sort of conveyance. Feeling faint and ill, I found my way to an inn which

I knew was not very far distant. The landlord had not got a carriage of any kind, but he promised to procure one for me from a friend living a few miles distant; and as it was getting late he proposed that I should have dinner and be ready to start in the evening. I agreed to this, and as I was feeling a good deal upset from my fall, I foolishly took a rather strong glass of brandy and water at this meal. Afterwards, I threw myself into an arm-chair before a wood fire to await the arrival of the carriage. Before many minutes had elapsed I was fast asleep.

“Meanwhile the landlord’s messenger had returned with the news that no conveyance could be had, owing to a ball that was being given in the neighbourhood; and my host, ignorant of the fact that I was a midshipman, and bound to be on board my ship at a certain hour, did not trouble to rouse me. The honest fellow saw that I was sound asleep, and evidently much fatigued, so he desired his wife

to prepare a bedroom for me, and let me sleep on in peaceful ignorance.

“You may imagine my horror when I awoke about eleven o’clock and learnt these particulars. I must tell you that I ought to have reported myself on board the ship at nine o’clock, which was the hour at which my leave expired. It was now too late to do anything further, for I could not have walked to Portsmouth to save my life. The landlord was in a great state of mind when I explained my position to him, and promised that I should have a carriage at daybreak the following morning. I then went to bed, but not a wink of sleep did I get all night, for I knew that the captain had a serious grudge against me (I can’t tell you about this now), and would be only too glad of an excuse for venting his spite upon me.

“Well, I was off at daylight the next morning, and reached Portsmouth in good time. I just called in at the livery stables to ascer-

tain what had become of the horse, and found that he had returned of his own accord overnight. In a very unpleasant frame of mind I went on board the ship, and as ill-luck would have it, the very first person I encountered was the captain. It's no use my telling you what followed. I will only say that the captain coolly intimated that he did not believe a word of my story, and this so enraged me—you know how quick-tempered I am—that I hotly answered him back, and told him he was no gentleman. I was immediately put under arrest, and the upshot of it all is, darling mother, that I have actually been dismissed from the service, and am thrown on my beam-ends ashore. It is indeed a cruel fate, and I can scarcely as yet realise my own misery. I wish I had listened to you, and never entered a service where such acts of injustice can be committed under the name of discipline.

“What the future has in store for me I know not. I cannot, cannot, come home till I

have wiped out this disgrace. Forgive me, and believe me, ever your loving son,

“HUGH DURRANT.


“*P.S.*—I will write again soon and give you an address.”

As Ernest finished reading the letter, and was preparing, boy-like, to break out in an angry tirade against his brother's inhuman captain, a heavy step was heard descending the stairs, and the next moment Sir Henry Durrant entered the room. The dread news had no sooner been communicated to him by his wife than he hurriedly rang the bell and ordered a carriage to be got ready to convey him to Exeter, whence he intended to take the coach to Portsmouth. Swallowing a hasty breakfast, the worthy baronet, who had kept marvellously calm and collected under his misfortune, but whose eyes and lips betrayed the distressed feelings that he was endeavouring to

keep under control, - was whirled away from Hazeldene at a rapid pace, and Lady Durrant and Ernest were left to comfort one another at home as best they might in such distressing circumstances.

CHAPTER II.

THE BROTHERS' PARTING.

N the afternoon of the second day, after the events narrated in our last chapter, Ernest Durrant, who had been exceedingly loving and attentive to his sorrow-stricken mother ever since his father's departure, seized his gun, which was standing in a corner of the hall, and sallied out in search of a covey of partridges which was said to be in close proximity to the house. The poor boy had not been outside the doors since the news of his brother's misfortune had arrived, and Lady Durrant had, on this particular day, insisted upon his taking some exercise, as she had not failed to note his pale cheeks and listless manner.

Throwing his gun over his shoulder, and followed by a favourite setter, Ernest strode away over the park; and a sharp, exhilarating walk in the teeth of a fresh autumnal breeze soon brought the colour into his cheeks, and banished the sad and anxious expression which it is always so painful to see on the faces of the young.

Thanks to the keen and sportsmanlike instincts of his canine friend, Ernest had succeeded in bringing down a brace of plump partridges, and was on the point of clambering over a gate in order to get into another field, when he was surprised to hear a clear but subdued whistle proceeding from a copse which bordered on the road, not more than twenty or thirty yards distant from the spot where he then was. Turning in astonishment, he caught sight of a tall lithe figure springing out of the underwood into the field where he was standing. With a delighted cry of "Hugh!" the young sportsman threw his

gun—at the imminent risk of its exploding—upon the ground, and bounded forward in the direction of the mysterious new arrival, closely followed by “Kerry,” the setter, who seemed wild with delight, and never ceased giving vent to eager barks of welcome and recognition.

In a moment the two brothers were affectionately wringing each other’s hands, but the sad, pained look had again crept over Ernest’s bright winning face. This sudden and unexpected meeting with his brother had brought back to his mind, only too vividly, the story of Hugh’s misfortunes.

Hugh Durrant was a tall, handsome boy, nearly two years older than his brother. There was a strong family likeness between the two, but the elder boy’s face was even more aristocratic-looking than his brother’s, and his features were more regular. The chief difference, however, lay in their eyes—Hugh’s being of a rare dark-grey colour, and Ernest’s a rich soft brown.

"Oh, Hugh! I'm so glad you've come home after all!" exclaimed the younger boy. "Mother will be so delighted!"

A pained look spread itself over Hugh's handsome brow.

"I haven't really come home," he answered somewhat huskily. "I wanted to get a look at the old place again before I went away for good, and hearing a shot fired, I guessed it was you, and couldn't resist the temptation of speaking to you again."

"I should think not, indeed," said Ernest, who was still holding his brother's hand, and gazing fixedly at him with humid eyes. Then he continued, in an imploring tone, "Do come home with me, Hugh, and see the mater; it will break her heart if you go away without seeing her."

But Hugh compressed his lips in a determined manner.

"It would only make matters worse," he replied, in an unsteady voice, which went to

his brother's heart; "I have given her anxiety enough already, and will not add to it, or give her the opportunity of endeavouring to shake my resolution."

"Have you seen father, Hugh? He started for Portsmouth on Tuesday, thinking he might be able to see you."

The elder boy started.

"The dear old man!" he exclaimed. "I have seen nothing of him, and must have passed him on the road, I suppose."

"Hugh!" exclaimed Ernest, with sudden energy, "why don't you appeal to the Admiralty, and tell them of the shameful way Captain Sharp has treated you?"

"It wouldn't be of the slightest good," replied the other gloomily. "Sharp has a tremendous lot of interest at the Admiralty, and their Lordships wouldn't pay any attention to me."

"But they would listen to father," pleaded Ernest; "he will go up to London and see

them, and explain how it was that you broke your leave, and tell them what provocation that horrid man Sharp gave you."

"It would be worse than useless, Ernest; I am positive of it. I must be off now. You mustn't let the mater know that I've been down here." And so saying, Hugh shook Ernest warmly by the hand, and turned away as if anxious to cut short the painful parting from his well-beloved brother.

But Ernest clung vehemently to him.

"Hugh! Hugh! don't go away," he pleaded, with all a sensitive boy's passionate ardour; "come home with me and talk it over with mother; she can advise you best what to do."

Hugh's eyes glistened for a moment, and he appeared to be even wavering in his determination. His brother's affection doubtless touched him very deeply, and visions of a fond mother and a dearly-loved home must have presented themselves with almost irresistible fascination momentarily to his mind.

Only momentarily, however, for almost immediately the old determined look resumed its sway in his strikingly handsome face.

“No, Ernest, dear old man!” he answered, in a voice which he vainly strove to steady; “you must not try to make me break my vow. I shall not return home till I have redeemed my character. God bless you!” And so saying, Hugh stooped down and imprinted a kiss upon his brother’s brow, disengaged himself from his grasp, turned, and with one bound had disappeared in the recesses of the copse.

Ernest strove to shout an entreaty to his brother to return, but a passion of grief sealed his lips, and no sound issued from them. A moment later he caught a hasty glimpse of Hugh’s retiring form disappearing around a corner of the road which led in the opposite direction to Hazeldene.

The poor boy, pale, and with the tears gathering in his eyes, stood as still as a statue

for a few moments. Then, unable to contain his feelings any longer, he threw himself upon the ground in a perfect agony of grief and burst into tears.

“Kerry,” the setter, who was a great favourite with his young masters, did not at all understand this outburst of sorrow. For some time he stood irresolute, gazing in a sympathetic manner at the boy’s prostrate form, and, doubtless, not a little alarmed at the loud sobs that met his ears. Then he quietly paced up to Ernest, scratched the boy’s shoulder with his paw, and then, bending down, licked his face.

This mark of affection from his faithful canine friend somewhat comforted Ernest, and after caressing the animal and talking to him for a little in his boyish way, he regained his feet, recovered his gun and brace of birds, and set off slowly homewards—“Kerry” following closely and sympathetically at heel.

Lady Durrant at once noticed the subdued

and mournful aspect of her youngest born when he returned to the house, but she forbore to ask any questions, and Ernest felt bound in honour not to disclose his brother's secret.

In some respects it was a fortunate thing that, on the very next day, an announcement came from the Admiralty for Ernest, informing him that he had been appointed to the *Shannon*, a frigate then forming part of the North American squadron. He was also directed in the same despatch to repair immediately to Devonport, in order that he might join the *Invincible*, a line-of-battle ship which was about to sail at once for Bermuda, where the *Shannon* was daily expected.

I say that it was a fortunate thing in some respects that this appointment arrived at Hazeldene at the time it did, for it served to some extent to distract the thoughts of both mother and son, and prevented their brooding over the painful circumstances which

enviored the fate of the unfortunate and somewhat wilful Hugh. It was necessary that Ernest should start for the great western seaport in two days' time, and there was, therefore, no time to be lost in preparing the young middy's outfit, which required replenishing before he went to sea again.

Ernest Durrant was full of excitement at the idea of joining a ship on the North American station, for he knew that in the spring of the year the United States—chiefly owing to Napoleon's Milan decree—had declared war against Great Britain, and that, therefore, there was a chance of his seeing some more active service afloat, for the war promised to develop largely into a maritime one. This fact would have been greatly in favour of Great Britain under ordinary circumstances, but as she was at the time engaged in a life-and-death struggle with Napoleon, and had to keep her finest ships in the English Channel and the Mediterranean to

hold the French fleets in check, it was, of course, impossible to annihilate the American fleet, as could otherwise have easily been done. But then, again, we may rest assured that no fiery declaration of war would have been issued from Washington had the Yankees not been alive to the fact that the British North American fleet could not be reinforced till the war in Europe should be brought to a peaceful conclusion.

Lady Durrant—as Sir Henry had not returned from his search for Hugh—accompanied her youngest son to Plymouth in a travelling carriage, and saw him safely on board the *Invincible*. Her heart sank when she heard the officers on board discussing the struggle with America, but she determined to keep up a brave spirit, as became a mother who had resigned both her sons to the marine service of her country; and she did not wish in the smallest degree to damp her brave boy's ardour and youthful aspirations. We must draw

a veil over the last sad parting between mother and son; and leaving poor Lady Durrant to return with an almost broken heart to Hazeldene, follow the fortunes of brave young Ernest as he careers over the waves in H.M.S. *Invincible*.

That redoubtable line-of-battle ship had lost sight of the Scilly Isles on a certain breezy morning, when she sighted two suspicious sail to the southward, and immediately altered course so as to speak them. The captain's orders were to make the best of his way to Bermuda, but he was, of course, to keep a bright look-out for French or American vessels, several of which were known to be hovering about the Chops of the Channel and in the Atlantic, in the hopes of intercepting some of the richly-laden British West Indian fleet.

When the *Invincible* sighted the strange vessels she was under all plain sail except royals and flying-jib, and had a nice topgallant breeze about a point before the starboard beam,

which sent her bowling merrily along at about eight knots an hour. As the sail she had sighted were some miles distant, it was at first rather difficult to make them out, but it was soon apparent that the *Invincible* was rapidly closing them. The reason of this quickly became apparent, for it was now made out through the telescopes that the two vessels were heading up Channel on the port tack. From their build and rig it was universally believed that they were Frenchmen.

Great excitement reigned fore and aft the *Invincible* when this news became known. The drum beat to quarters; the gunner opened the magazine and shell-room; the bluejackets partially stripped themselves and rushed enthusiastically to cast loose the guns, whilst the marines got their muskets in readiness for active service. The boarding-nettings were triced up, and every preparation made for what appeared to be an inevitable conflict.

Ernest Durrant, who had quickly made

friends with the *Invincible's* middies, was quite as excited as any one else, and took up his position at the quarter-deck quarters, where he would be able to see everything that passed.

On came the two strangers, evidently confident in their superior numbers. It was soon seen that the French flag was flaunting defiantly from their gaffs and rigging, and that the crews were clustered at their quarters ready for action.

"Starboard a little, quartermaster!" sang out the *Invincible's* captain, as he eagerly watched the approaching ships through his telescope. "Mr. Durrant! run below and tell the first-lieutenant to open fire from forward as the guns bear."

"Ay, ay, sir," the young midddy replied, and he dived down an adjoining hatchway in order to deliver the message.

As he returned to the quarter-deck the action commenced by the *Invincible* pitching a shot into the leading Frenchman, which was a two-

decker. She had forged considerably ahead of her consort, a heavily armed frigate; and this naturally was a favourable circumstance for the *Invincible*.

“Fire steadily, my lads, and take good aim!” thundered the captain, whose voice rang out like the blast of a trumpet.

The men at the upper-deck quarters cheered. At the same moment the leading Frenchman returned the fire, and in a few seconds the two ships, now passing each other on opposite tacks and within musket shot, were blazing away with every available gun, whilst the rival marines poured in volleys of deadly musketry. In a few seconds the combatants were enshrouded in dense clouds of smoke, and it was impossible for either party to ascertain what damage had been done by their respective gunners.

Determined to take the French frigate if possible, the captain of the *Invincible* ordered his sail-trimmers on deck, and made them take in the topgallant sails and man the weather braces.

Soon running out of the smoke which enveloped her, the English liner perceived that the French frigate was keeping straight on her course in the wake of her powerful consort, and was now almost within range. The latter was now tacking as if with the intention of returning to renew the engagement.

Promptly opening fire upon the frigate, the *Invincible's* captain bore up under cover of the eddying folds of smoke, and before the enemy could divine his intention, had passed under the latter's stern, and delivered a raking and destructive fire, which created havoc amongst the crowded Frenchmen on the upper-deck. The unfortunate frigate also had her main-topmast and spanker-gaff shot away at the same time. So little did the officers relish this rough usage from their opponents, that they immediately bore up and steered away in the direction of the French coast, as if with the intention of repairing damages.

The captain of the *Invincible* now again


turned his attention to the French two-decker war-ship, and approached her close-hauled on the port-tack. The Frenchmen seemed nothing loth to renew the action, and in a few moments were at it hammer-and-tongs with their English rivals. Both ships were now hove-to, almost within pistol-shot; and the roar of the guns, the sharp crack of the musketry, and the cheers of the excited combatants filled the air with an almost deafening clamour.

The fight, however, was not destined to be a protracted one, for the British fought with such determination and fury, and directed their aim with such consummate accuracy, that in a very short time several of the Frenchmen's guns were dismounted, and they were forced to slacken in their fire. Perceiving this, and intuitively grasping the situation, the captain of the *Invincible* determined to take advantage of the occurrence, and attempt to run alongside his enemy and carry her by boarding in true British style.

The French captain, however, was fully alive to his danger, and dreaded nothing so much as an irruption of the *Invincible's* blue-jackets over his hammock-nettings. The instant, therefore, that he divined by the manœuvring of the English liner her captain's intentions, he immediately braced his yards round, bore up, and spreading every cloth that would draw to the freshening breeze, stood away for the French coast without attempting to fire another shot, signalling at the same time to his consort to follow the same tactics.

CHAPTER III.

A NAUTICAL CHALLENGE.

HE *Invincible* lost no time in endeavouring to thwart the French captain's plan of showing a clean pair of heels, but she was now in her turn confronted with difficulties, for it soon became apparent that her adversaries were clippers, and with such a favourable breeze as was then blowing, would not be very long in getting out of range of the English guns.

This was extremely mortifying to the English captain, who had counted on capturing at any-rate one of the vessels opposed to him, doubly mortifying, as his own ship had always been considered rather a crack sailer in the English navy.

It was quickly seen that the French frigate

—which by this time had shifted her main-topmast and effected other necessary repairs—had understood her consort's signal, for though she had apparently intended beating up to renew the engagement, she wore round on perceiving the liner's bunting fluttering out from the mast-head, and trimming her sails, with great promptitude stood away on a southeasterly course.

For some time the *Invincible* kept up the chase, occasionally yawing and sending a shot hurtling through the air in the direction of the flying ships, but as soon as the English captain saw that his wily opponents were slowly but surely increasing their distance, and would in a very short time be out of range, he thought it wiser to give up the useless chase, especially as the shades of evening were already beginning to fall.

There had been a few casualties on board the English two-decker. Three men had been killed whilst serving the main-deck guns, and there

was a rather long list of wounded—two cases only, however, being of a serious nature. Ernest Durrant, who had remained upon the quarter-deck during the engagement, had received a slight contusion from a splinter, but the hurt was not sufficiently serious to incapacitate him from duty. The *Invincible* had been hulled in various places, but had not lost any spars, though her rigging was a good deal cut up, which necessitated some knotting and splicing before the voyage could be resumed.

Ernest, in common with all the other midshipmen in the ship, was grievously disappointed at the turn affairs had taken. It was certainly tantalising that, just as they were on the point of mustering their respective boarding parties, and anxiously awaiting the moment when the captain should thunder out his orders for them to carry the Frenchman in dashing style, cutlass and pike in hand, the latter should have managed to creep away from them, and ignominiously take refuge in flight. However, the

eager young midshipmen had to make the best of matters, and resumed their duty with an inward hope that they would have better luck next time.

In this, however, they were disappointed, at any rate whilst the voyage of the *Invincible* to Bermuda lasted, for, though a bright look-out was kept for either French or American ships of war, not a vessel of these nationalities hove in sight, and the two-decker threaded her way through the somewhat intricate passages leading to Grassy Bay without a prize in tow.

Ernest, whilst the *Invincible* was being taken in through the Narrows by a pilot, was on the forecastle with a telescope, anxiously watching for the first glimpse of his ship, the *Shannon*, which the pilot had informed him was then at moorings in the harbour.

“Oh! isn’t she a beauty just?” burst involuntarily from our young friend’s lips, as, on turning a projecting point, the smart and shapely frigate was disclosed to his restless gaze.

Certainly H.M.S. *Shannon* deserved the heartiest encomiums that could be passed upon her, for not only had she a remarkably handsome hull, with beautiful bends and run, but her spars and rigging were all a-taunto and well set up; and her yards were as square and the sails as neatly furled as the most fastidious boatswain that ever trod a deck could desire. Order and discipline was the prevailing characteristic of this saucy craft as she swung idly at her moorings; her black hull, chequered port-holes—from which the highly-polished muzzles of the guns were frowningly protruded—and lofty spars and tracery of rigging, clearly reflected in the placid mirror-like expanse of water that environed her stately fabric.

“Hands by the best bower anchor, Mr. Jones!” roared the captain of the *Invincible*, as he found his ship approaching the anchorage.

Sail had been shortened some time previously, and the huge vessel was gliding with a majestic

swan-like motion into the harbour under top-sails, jib, and spanker.

Presently the sonorous voice of the captain again pealed out, and this time the order was "Shorten sail! Clew up the topsails!" Lastly came the gruff roar of the old boatswain, "One, two, three, let go!" and with a thundering splash the massive anchor, released from its fetters, was precipitated into its watery bed. Whilst the seamen swarmed aloft to furl sails, Ernest dived below to finish his packing, and prepare to transport himself to his own proper floating home—his marine *alma mater*. How he wished that Hugh was with him, and that they were about to serve on board the *Shannon* together! It was exceedingly painful for him to realise that he knew absolutely nothing as to his brother's whereabouts, but it was always a melancholy consolation to him to think of that brother's affectionate leave-taking, and he felt that he must wait patiently on, trusting to hear good news from his parents by-and-by.

At the time that Ernest Durrant joined the *Shannon*, that frigate was commanded by one of the smartest and most capable officers in the service, Captain Philip Bowes Vere Broke; and it was chiefly owing to the interest he took in the science of gunnery, and to the constant practice which he gave the crew, that the latter was noted as the most efficient body of blue-jackets on the station. The *Shannon* was a 38-gun frigate—so-called—but her armament was really more powerful than this name would appear to convey, as, in addition to her 18-pounder main-deck guns, which counted fourteen on a broadside, she was armed with sixteen 32-pounder carronades, and four long 9-pounders on the quarter-deck and forecastle. In addition to this the frigate had two 12-pounder stern-chasers, and small swivel guns in the fore and main tops. In fact, we may say plainly that the English Government, tardily awaking to the fact that the American frigates were of much larger tonnage than the majority of their own,

and more heavily armed, had seen fit to equip one or two vessels of the *Shannon* class in a more sensible and practical manner than had hitherto been done, and to the neglect of which must be principally attributed the defeats Great Britain had suffered at the hands of her United States rivals; and—most bitter pill of all to swallow—upon that element o'er which “the flag that for a thousand years had braved the battle and the breeze,” had been accustomed to consider itself almost paramount. It was a rude awakening, but a wholesome one.

Ernest was delighted with his new ship, and felt very proud at belonging to such a smart and efficient vessel, and also at having the privilege of being one of Captain Broke's midshipmen. He was very kindly received by his new messmates, and consequently did not take long to shake down comfortably on board. Two days after the arrival of the *Invincible* the *Shannon* sailed for the West Indies.

Captain Broke was especially anxious to meet

one of the heavily-armed 44-gun American frigates then cruising in the Atlantic, and to have the opportunity of proving to the tall-talking Yankees that he could give her a drubbing. For some little time an opportunity did not occur, but meanwhile the English captain was indefatigable in practising his men at gunnery, cutlass exercise, and other important duties, so that when the critical moment arrived they should feel perfect confidence in themselves and in their ship.

Whilst the *Shannon* was lying at Port Royal, Jamaica, during the winter months, Ernest received a letter from his mother telling him that Hugh had been travelling for a short time upon the Continent, and whilst in Italy had met an old schoolfellow who had been sent there on account of his health, and whose parents lived in Canada, and were possessed of considerable property in that country. Fired with his friend's description of Canadian life, Hugh had decided to make his way at once

to that colony, in the hopes of finding some suitable occupation; and Lady Durrant concluded her letter by saying, that she hoped ere long to be enabled to forward Ernest his address in Canada, so that in the event of the *Shannon* being at Halifax or Quebec, the brothers might possibly be enabled to meet.

In the spring of the following year, it so happened that Ernest's ship was at Halifax for a short time, but as no news of Hugh's whereabouts had as yet reached his brother, it was impossible to make any plans for meeting.

Early one morning, whilst at this port, when Ernest happened to be upon watch, Captain Broke came upon deck, as was his wont, to inhale a little fresh air and to see that the decks had been properly scrubbed.

"Mr. Durrant," he sang out suddenly, "tell the first-lieutenant and the boatswain that we shall get under weigh at six-bells in the forenoon watch; and have my gig's crew called away."

“Ay, ay, sir,” and away ran Ernest to execute the commissions.

A few minutes later he reported to the captain that the gig was manned, and then stood near the entry-port with the first-lieutenant, Mr. Watt, in order to see his superior over the side according to etiquette.

As Captain Broke was preparing to descend the ladder, he turned to the first-lieutenant and observed, “I’ve received some information with regard to those Yankee frigates we have been on the look-out for, and am going on board the *Tenedos* to consult Captain Hyde Parker as to our taking a cruise together in Boston Bay.”

“I am very glad to hear it, sir,” answered Mr. Watt; “and I hope that this time we shall not be disappointed.”

“I hope not too. Please to see everything clear for getting under weigh. There is a nice favourable breeze for making an offing.”

It was not long before Ernest Durrant had conveyed the exciting news of the projected cruise

to his messmates in the midshipmen's berth; and great was the hilarity and enthusiasm over Captain Broke's bellicose decision, as my readers may suppose.

The *Tenedos* was a frigate of about the same tonnage and force as the *Shannon*, and Captain Hyde Parker—who commanded her—was fully as anxious as Captain Broke to meet an American vessel on equal terms, and offer her battle.

The news which had reached the ears of the captain of the *Shannon* was this, that two powerful American frigates, the *President* and the *Congress*, were lying in Boston harbour nearly ready to put to sea. Here seemed to be the long-wished-for opportunity, and the two English captains were not long in making up their minds as to the course they should pursue.

With a steady fair breeze the two British frigates sailed in company from Halifax, and pointed their bowsprits in the direction of Boston harbour. They were not long in making their appearance off that hostile port.

On reconnoitring the harbour, however, it was soon seen that the American frigates were not quite ready to put to sea. The *Shannon* and *Tenedos* therefore cruised on and off the port, anxiously waiting to intercept them as soon as they should venture out. The Americans evidently did not quite relish the warlike appearance of the Britishers, for instead of sallying out boldly to try conclusions with them, they slyly put to sea during the prevalence of a fog without being discovered by the blockading vessels.

Great was the indignation and disappointment of Captains Broke and Hyde Parker, when they discovered the trick that had been played upon them. It was useless to cruise in search of the American vessels, for they had obtained an excellent start, and of course there were no means of ascertaining in which direction they had gone.

It was somewhat consoling at this juncture to discover that the *Chesapeake*, another

American frigate, had slipped into the harbour to effect a few repairs; and Captain Broke, with characteristic promptitude and pluck, at once decided to challenge her to a single combat—Captain Hyde Parker having agreed to take the *Tenedos* for a short cruise, so as to leave the two vessels to fight it out together without interference.

The *Chesapeake* had returned into harbour after a cruise in the Atlantic and off the coast of South America and the West Indian islands, during which time she had succeeded in recapturing one merchant vessel and seizing four other prizes. She was a powerful ship, well-found in every respect, and carried twenty-eight long 18-pounders on the main-deck, twenty carronades—32-pounders—on the quarter-deck and forecastle, as well as a long 18-pounder. Her crew numbered 376, exclusive of boys, whilst the *Shannon* could only muster 306. In armament the rival ships were as nearly as possible equal, the *Chesapeake* having some

slight advantage in weight of metal. In point of tonnage the latter vessel had a displacement of 1135 tons, whilst the *Shannon* measured only 1066.

As soon as the *Chesapeake* had refitted, Captain Broke sent in several verbal messages to the American captain—whose name was Lawrence—challenging him to come outside and meet him ship-to-ship. As no answers were received, and it seemed doubtful if the messages could have been delivered, Captain Broke sent his rival a letter, the conclusion of which is perhaps worth quoting. It ran as follows:—"I entreat you, sir, not to imagine that I am urged by mere personal vanity to the wish of meeting the *Chesapeake*, or that I depend only upon your personal ambition for your acceding to this invitation. We have both nobler motives. You will feel it as a compliment if I say, that the result of our meeting may be the most grateful service I can render to my country; and I doubt not that you,

equally confident of success, will feel convinced that it is only by repeated triumphs in *even combats* that your little navy can now hope to console your country for the loss of that trade it can no longer protect. Favour me with a speedy reply, as we are short of provisions and water, and cannot stay long here."

Not long after this letter had been sent, the *Shannon* sailed in close to the harbour's mouth and hove-to. The *Chesapeake* was visible lying in the roadstead, and evidently quite ready to put to sea.


A perfect fever of excitement took possession of the undaunted *Shannons* when they saw that the *Chesapeake* was loosing her topsails.

The challenge was accepted, and the American frigate was about to get under weigh!

Presently she fired a gun, loosed her top-gallant-sails, and with a fair westerly breeze, tripped her anchor and began to glide out of the harbour.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAY OF BATTLE.

APTAIN BROKE had himself gone to the masthead of the *Shannon* to observe the movements of the *Chesapeake*, and as soon as he saw that the latter vessel was actually weighing anchor, he descended to the deck and issued an order to trim and make sail. Then under topsails and topgallant-sails the gallant *Shannon* turned her nose seawards, so as to get a little offing before commencing the fight. The *Chesapeake* followed, accompanied by a schooner, gunboat, and a number of pleasure craft, the occupants of which were looking forward with great gusto to witnessing the sight of an English frigate being “whipped” by an American one.

At about half-past one the *Chesapeake* hauled

up and fired a gun, as if in defiance. Having now made a sufficient offering for his purpose, Captain Broke also hauled up, and took a reef in his topsails ; but finding later on that a current was setting him in towards the land, he again bore away seawards, with the *Chesapeake* some miles astern.

It was 5 P.M. before Captain Broke again threw his vessel up in the wind, and hove-to to await his foe's approach. At 5.30, or thereabouts, the American, with a lot of bunting displayed, sailed down straight for the *Shannon's* starboard quarter. The crews of both ships were clustered grimly at their quarters with guns loaded and run out, and quite ready to engage at a moment's notice.

Ernest Durrant was stationed at the after main-deck quarters, and as it happened, it was this part of the *Shannon's* battery that was destined to begin the engagement.

Silent, determined, and apparently confident of success, the *Chesapeake* bore down, and when

within sixty or seventy yards of her rival, luffed up and hove to.

The instant that the *Shannon's* aftermost gun, which was loaded with two round shot and a keg containing 150 musket balls, would bear, it was discharged full into the *Chesapeake's* hull, and in a few moments the two ships were engaged in a desperate and sanguinary struggle. The guns flashed and roared uninterruptedly, the musketry blazed forth fusillade after fusillade amid the blinding folds of eddying smoke; whilst ever and anon could be distinguished the deep-throated cheers of the combatants, and the pathetic wails of agony from those who had been laid low by ruthless shot or bullet.

After the fight had raged for a few minutes without advantage to either combatants, it was seen that the *Chesapeake* was, without any apparent reason, coming sharp up into the wind, and this movement enabled the clever gunners of the *Shannon* to pour in such a raking fire that the Americans deserted their upper-deck

guns in a panic. In a few minutes the *Chesapeake's* port quarter had collided with the *Shannon's* starboard fore-chains and waist.

Captain Broke now determined to board without delay. He therefore sung out to the boatswain to instantly lash the two ships together, whilst he collected the boarders whom he intended to head in person.

“Cease firing!” was now the order yelled along the *Shannon's* fighting-deck, followed by “On deck, all the boarders!” Hastily arming themselves with cutlasses and pikes, the men streamed up from below, eager to come to close quarters with their antagonists. One of the first on deck was Ernest, and with a boy's quickness he immediately saw that the boatswain, Mr. Stevens, was being fiercely attacked by the Americans whilst endeavouring to pass a lashing around the rigging of both vessels. Rushing forward, in company with a middy named Samwell and some bluejackets, he endeavoured to go to the boatswain's rescue; but

before the party had advanced more than a few yards the unfortunate Mr. Stevens was seen to fall heavily backwards to the deck. On reaching his prostrate body, it was found that he had lost an arm and was mortally wounded by musketry. As the middies sprung upon the hammock-nettings to assist the seamen in their dangerous task of passing the lashing, poor young Samwell was struck by several bullets, and fell headlong to the deck, whence he was carried below by some of the carpenter's crew who were standing by.

Ernest was horror-struck at this mischance, but there was no time to waste in thinking over the matter, and the young midddy at once set to work to assist and encourage the remaining seamen, who were still engaged in securing the two vessels together; and in spite of the heavy fire of musketry the Americans kept up upon the devoted little band, the latter accomplished their purpose without any further loss of life.

“Well done, youngster!” Ernest heard a loud voice shouting behind him; “you’re made of the right stuff for our service, and you may rely upon it I shan’t forget your pluck.”

Turning round, the middy found that it was Captain Broke himself who had addressed him.

“The boatswain and poor Samwell have been killed, sir,” replied Ernest, “and I’m only trying to finish off their work for them.”

“Some brave fellows have lost the number of their mess,” said the captain sadly; “but it is no time now to mourn their loss, and I can only thank God that I have got equally brave and true men to take their places.”

“The lashings are passed securely now, sir,” exclaimed Ernest, as, followed by the bluejackets who had been assisting him, he leaped off the hammock-nettings to the deck.

“Now is our time to board, lads,” thundered Captain Broke; “give the Yankees a taste of your cutlasses and boarding-pikes! Keep close to me, Mr. Durrant, and then I shall be able to

keep an eye upon you ;” and so saying he drew his sword from its sheath, and springing on the nettings, shouted enthusiastically, “The victory is already half won !”

With a hearty cheer the boarders rushed in support of their brave leader, and Ernest, who had armed himself with a cutlass and brace of pistols, joined the Captain’s immediate *entourage*, and was one of the first to set foot upon the *Chesapeake’s* quarter-deck. This proved a much easier matter than any one could have foreseen, as the Americans had deserted their upper-deck guns, and had apparently made no dispositions for repelling boarders. In the waist, however, a number of them had congregated, as if with the intention of disputing the onward rush of Captain Broke and his followers, and the crews of the main-deck guns were now beginning to swarm up the hatchways to the assistance of their comrades.

Nothing, however, could withstand the determined advance of the *Shannons*, who swept on

to the attack like a whirlwind. In an instant the Americans were scattered like chaff, and those who were not at once pistolled or cut down fled to the forecastle. Meanwhile a galling fire was being kept up from the *Chesapeake's* tops, and some of the English marines were told off to answer it, and endeavour to pick off the marksmen, but as the latter were concealed behind hammocks, it was no easy matter to dislodge them. Seeing this, Captain Broke desired Ernest to return on board the *Shannon*, and tell Willie Smith, the middy of the maintop, to go aloft with some of his men, and endeavour to silence the fire from thence. This duty was at once undertaken, in a most daring and deliberate manner, by this brave young officer. He collected half-a-dozen of his topmen, and ascending the fore-rigging with them, got upon the foreyard, and, exposed to a withering fire, passed along it, and jumping on the *Chesapeake's* mainyard — which was braced up to her rival's foreyard — scrambled

along it, and in a most dashing and gallant manner stormed the Yankee's maintop. The occupants of that point of vantage attempted to resist, but they were soon overcome, and those who were not killed were driven on deck and taken prisoner.

Meanwhile the Americans on the fore-castle had surrendered; and placing a sentry over them, Captain Broke somewhat unwisely sent his men aft to assist Mr. Watt, who was meeting with some fresh resistance upon the quarter-deck, remaining himself upon the fore-castle to keep order. No sooner did the prisoners, however, notice this, than they broke away from the sentry, and rushed to attack Captain Broke.

Ernest, with his usual quickness, saw what was going forward, and shouted at the top of his voice to warn the captain of his danger. Then rushing forward with half-a-dozen men, he endeavoured to stem the onward rush of the Americans. He was almost too late, for Captain Broke, unable to defend himself against

such overpowering numbers, had been already struck to the deck, bleeding profusely and almost senseless. In a few moments the cowardly assailants had been secured and disarmed, and the captain helped upon his feet again. Just at this instant Ernest caught sight of an American midshipman descending one of the backstays from the *Chesapeake's* foretop, and directly this individual reached the deck, he rushed up to him, pistol in hand, and demanded his surrender, for he was afraid that some fresh treachery might be forthcoming.

To the poor boy's inexpressible horror, he found himself face-to-face with his brother Hugh!

Never before surely happened such a strange and painful meeting between two brothers!

"For God's sake, don't shoot me, Ernest!" said Hugh, in a low tone. "I recognised you from the foretop, and have come down to surrender myself."

Ernest Durrant, who was as pale as death, hardly heard his brother's remark, and for a few seconds he was too dumbfounded to speak.

"Hugh!" he gasped at length, "what *are* you doing on board the *Chesapeake*? What does it all mean?"

"It's too long a story to tell you now," replied his brother, speaking quickly and in the same cautious tone. "I was impressed on board this ship, and have been fighting against my will. Take me prisoner now, and I'll explain everything later on; but mind you, if I can't prove my case I shall stand a chance of swinging at the yard-arm. Say not a word to any one at present."

Poor Ernest shuddered, but as some officers were approaching, he recovered his presence of mind with a great effort, formally took his brother prisoner, and handed him over to some marines to be disarmed and secured. He then returned aft again to see if he could

render any assistance to the first lieutenant. That officer, however, had now overcome all opposition, but just as Ernest reached the quarter-deck he heard him sing out, "Let's haul down the Yankee flag, my lads, and hoist the British ensign in its place!"

Determined to assist in this exciting duty, which would announce to the *Shannons* who were on board their own ship that the victory was won, our young midddy darted along the deck, and joined Mr. Watt and a party of men who were doubling aft to the spot where the signal-halyards were belayed. It was the work of a moment to haul down the American colours, and Ernest, who had snatched an English ensign out of one of the adjacent lockers, handed it to the first lieutenant, who in the excitement of the moment, and unobserved by any one else, unfortunately bent it on below the American colours instead of above them.

"Hoist away roundly!" he sang out, and

immediately two or three bluejackets swayed away at the halyards, and without looking above their heads began running the bunting up to the gaff-end.

Fatal error fatally atoned for !

The men on board the *Shannon*, seeing the Yankee flag *uppermost*, not unnaturally took it for granted that their shipmates were getting the worst of the conflict, and as the two frigates had broken adrift, and were now some little distance apart, they could not clearly distinguish what was going on aboard the *Chesapeake*. With fatal promptitude and with fatally correct aim they opened fire upon the American frigate, and one of the shots killed the first lieutenant instantaneously, a grape shot taking off the upper part of his head. Several of the English seamen were killed at the same time, but Ernest escaped as if by a miracle.

Glancing aloft, and instantly comprehending what had occurred, the plucky youngster hurriedly hauled down the bunting, bent the flags

on correctly, and aided by some of his ship-mates, hoisted them once more to the gaff. The bitter mortification experienced by the men of the *Shannon* when they discovered their fatal error may be imagined, and the incident threw a gloom over the victors which even the knowledge of the glorious laurels they had won was powerless to dissipate.

Captain Broke meanwhile had fainted from loss of blood, and was quickly conveyed on board his own ship to be attended to by the surgeons. The second lieutenant, Mr. Wallis,* was now in command of the latter vessel, and Lieutenant Falkiner was told off to take charge of the captured *Chesapeake*.

Thus ended this famous engagement, which in reality only lasted for about twenty minutes or so, and which was to prove to the Americans that they could not venture to meet the Mistress of the Seas upon her own elements with

* Afterwards Admiral Sir Provo Wallis, who died at the age of 100.

any chance of success, when the strength of the latter was nearly equal to their own. To the detriment of the character of American seamen it must be related, that upon the *Chesapeake's* forecastle was discovered a large cask of un-slacked lime, which was to be utilised for throwing in the faces of the *Shannon's* seamen should they have the temerity to attempt to board. By a singular instance of retributive justice this cask, early in the engagement, was struck by a shot from the *Shannon*, and the lime was scattered in every direction, and caused great annoyance and inconvenience to those who had conceived this unmanly and cowardly mode of meeting a brave enemy.

The *Chesapeake* suffered heavily in this engagement, her commander and first lieutenant being both mortally wounded, and the master, fourth lieutenant, and officer of marines killed, whilst the second and third lieutenants and five midshipmen were wounded. In all, the Americans suffered a loss of forty-seven killed and ninety-nine

wounded, whilst the British had to bewail the loss of twenty-four killed and fifty-nine wounded.

As soon as possible the two frigates repaired their damages, and sailed for Halifax, at which port they were received with the greatest enthusiasm.

The instant that Ernest Durrant was released from duty on the day of the engagement, he hurried to the door of the captain's cabin and accosted the marine there stationed.

"Sentry, can I speak to the captain for a minute on important business?"

"Don't know, sir, I'm sure. The captain's wounded, as you know, and the surgeons left word that he was not to be disturbed."

Ernest's face fell, but at this moment the captain's steward came to the door, and the midddy at once gave him a brief outline of Hugh's misadventure, and begged him to mention the matter to Captain Broke.

"I almost think he'd see you himself, sir," said the man, "for he was talking of you a

little while ago, and saying as how you'd probably saved his life."

Ernest coloured with pleasure, but before he could say anything the good-natured steward had returned into the cabin and shut the door. He soon reappeared with a smile on his face.

"The captain will see you just for a minute, Mr. Durrant," he said, "but you mustn't let him talk much."

Ernest slipped in, and crossing the fore-cabin was ushered by the steward into the darkened sleeping-cabin abaft all.

In his cot, deadly pale and swathed in bandages, lay the wounded chief, who threw a kindly look of recognition at the young midshipman as the latter approached him.

"You needn't be alarmed at my appearance," he observed, in a somewhat weak voice; "my wounds are not very serious, the surgeons say, and I hope soon to be out and about again. I owe you a thousand thanks for your gallant conduct during the engagement, Mr. Durrant,

and I believe that I owe my life to you and those brave seamen who came to my rescue upon the forecastle. The Admiralty shall know of it by-and-by when I send home the despatches."

Ernest began to express his gratitude, but the captain cut him short.

"And now what is it you want to see me about, my lad?"

"About my brother, sir," began Ernest, in faltering accents; "he was taken prisoner on board the *Chesapeake*, and is now under arrest with the American officers."

"Your brother!" exclaimed Captain Broke, in astonished accents; "how came he to be serving on board an enemy's ship?"

"I've not learned all the particulars yet, sir," answered Ernest, with a blush of shame upon his cheek, "but it seems that my brother was impressed on board the *Chesapeake* by the Americans, and was forced to take part in the fight against his will."

"That is quite possible, of course," said the

captain kindly, for he saw how much his midshipman suffered in reciting the strange story. "Was your brother living in the United States, Mr. Durrant, or how came he to be in Boston?"

"The last thing I heard of him was that he had sailed for Canada, sir, but I have not yet learned by what mischance he came to be in an enemy's port."

"By-the-bye," said the captain, half-raising himself and looking earnestly at the middy, "is this your brother Hugh, the eldest son of Sir Henry, who was dismissed the service through some spiteful act of Captain Sharp's?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ernest, who had a hard struggle to repress his emotion; "Hugh was very cruelly treated, and it nearly broke my father's and mother's hearts."

"I heard all about it," said the captain, "and know that your brother was not to blame. You had better go now to the senior lieutenant, and tell him that I wish Mr. Hugh Durrant at once released from arrest. He had better

mess in the gunroom until we reach Halifax, when I trust he will return home to his parents and give up any Canadian schemes he may have in his head."

Ernest warmly expressed his thanks and then retired, for though he was anxious to pursue the conversation, he remembered the steward's injunction, that the captain was not to be allowed to over-exert himself. Quitting the cabin the midddy ran with a light heart to the senior lieutenant, and gave him Captain Broke's message; then this officer's permission, having been obtained, he rushed to the spot, between two maindeck guns, where the American officers were confined. Passing behind a temporary canvas screen, which had been rigged up to shield the prisoners from the common gaze, Ernest immediately caught sight of his brother, who was seated on a bench with his elbows resting upon a rude table and his head buried in his hands, a picture of boyish misery and hopelessness.

The middy ran quickly to the young prisoner's side, and throwing his arms around his neck, exclaimed in delighted tones, "Cheer up, Hugh, old man; the captain has sent me to give you your liberty, and if you like you can return to England from Halifax."

The elder boy lifted a wan, weary face, and gazed anxiously at his brother. The good news was too sudden and too unexpected to be at once realised, but the bright happy expression on Ernest's countenance told its own tale only too legibly. Hugh clasped his brother's hands and his eyes grew humid, whilst the anxious mournful look upon his face vanished away in a moment, and was succeeded by an expression of radiant joy, which lit up his handsome young features most becomingly.

"You dear, old Ernest, how *did* you manage to work the oracle so splendidly? I owe everything to you, I know."

"I simply told the captain as much of your story as I knew," replied his brother, "and he

gave orders that you were to be at once released. Come, let's leave this place and go and have a chat somewhere. I'm dying to hear the story of your adventures."

"You may well say 'adventures,'" said Hugh, as he linked his arm in his brother's, and the two sauntered in the direction of the gun-room; "I'll tell you the yarn at once, that you may know how I came to be impressed on board the *Chesapeake*."

"Stop a minute, Hugh; I want you to do something for me."

"The request's granted before you ask it," said the elder boy gaily, and looking fondly at his brother's flushed, eager young face.

"I don't know if you'll half like it," began Ernest hesitatingly; "the fact is, I want you to take the captain's advice, and go straight home to father and mother. Please don't be angry with me, Hugh, but they really are miserable about you."

"I had settled in my own mind this morning

that I should go home on the first opportunity," answered Hugh; "but I little thought that the opportunity was coming so soon. The dear old pater and mater! how sorry I am to have given them pain. I'll try and make it up to them, for I know I've been headstrong and too ready to take the bit in my teeth."


"Won't they be delighted to see you, that's all!" exclaimed Ernest, with sparkling eyes; "I only wish I could be there to see the meeting."

"So do I," said his brother heartily; "but we must hope that the *Shannon* will soon be ordered to England, and then we shall all find ourselves once more at Hazeldene together."

"Now for your story," said Ernest, as the two seated themselves on a locker at one end of the gunroom. "Fire away, and tell us all about it."

CHAPTER V.

HUGH'S STORY.

“ELL, I suppose you remember,” began Hugh, “that I sailed for Canada in an Italian vessel bound for Quebec.

All went well till we began to approach the American coast, when a severe gale, or rather a succession of severe gales, blew us very much out of our course, and owing to the murky weather it became impossible to take any observations of the sun. In consequence of these mishaps the vessel ran ashore on a dark foggy night, and none of the officers could even guess at the whereabouts of their unlucky craft. To add to our misfortunes there was a heavy sea running, which threatened every minute to break up the ship with its violence. Rockets were sent up and guns fired, but no assistance

came, and in a very short time it became necessary to endeavour to land in the boats. Every one of these frail craft, however, were swamped or stove to pieces on the rocks, and it was only the powerful swimmers of the party who were enabled, in almost an exhausted state, to reach the shore. I was fortunately one of these, and when it began to get a little light we made our way inland, and then found that we were in United States territory—a fact I was uncommonly sorry to discover, for I knew that we were at war with the Yankees at this time. At first I was inclined to think that I'd fallen from the frying-pan into the fire, and had better try to escape to sea again and keep clear of the Yankees' clutches; but a friend who was with me persuaded me against this plan, saying—which was of course quite true—that the gale was still blowing with great violence, and would quite prevent any vessel putting to sea, and that the very fact of my evincing an anxiety to escape from the country would be certain to

arouse the suspicions of the inhabitants, who would infallibly have me arrested and thrown into prison.

“I must tell you about this friend.

“He was a young Italian of good family, named Giovanni Donello, and was on his way to join an elder brother who had settled in Canada some two years before. He and I had struck up a friendship on board the Italian vessel, and as he spoke English fairly well we had managed to understand each other without any difficulty. Donello was an uncommonly nice fellow, and as far as I could see a brave and sincere one. He was generous and hospitable too, for in our frequent conversations on board our unlucky ship, he had repeatedly pressed me to accompany him to his brother's home in Quebec, assuring me of a warm welcome. ‘From the house of my brother,’ he used to say, ‘you can look about yourself, and it is for certain you cannot long be without the work you shall seek.’

“Well, you won’t be surprised to hear, Ernest, that when it was a case of *sauve-qui-peut* on board the vessel, Donello and I stuck together, and managed to get into the same boat, which, however, was dreadfully overloaded, and was several times within an ace of being swamped. When at last she was dashed upon the rocks, and immediately broken to pieces, leaving us all struggling in the cruel waves, my friend and I never lost sight of each other, and hurriedly agreed to strike out boldly for the shore, now not very far distant. Many poor fellows were drowned, and we could do nothing to help them; but some were quite as good swimmers as we were, and succeeded in battling with the waves and reaching a small sheltered bay in safety.

“As I told you just now, we struck inland as soon as day broke, for we were cold and exhausted, and were much in want of food and dry clothes. In the bay where we had landed we had seen no signs of any inhabitants. Every-

thing had looked dreary and desolate to a degree, and the terrible fate of our ship and of so many of our fellow-passengers had made us feel rather despondent. Many of those who had escaped, straggled off in small parties to seek assistance without considering much where they were going, or what precautions it might be necessary to take, for at that time we had not the remotest idea on what part of the coast our vessel had been wrecked.

“Donello and I determined to share all perils and adventures in company, and so we kept together, and followed a beaten track which led across some fields in a westerly direction. We were virtually alone, for though some of our shipmates were on the same track as ourselves, they had—in their eagerness to find food and shelter—pushed on at a rapid pace, and left us far in the rear. So busily engaged were Donello and I in talking over plans for the future that we did not notice this fact for some time. At last, in passing over some rising ground, we

came in sight of a village and a church steeple. 'Hurrah ! here's civilisation at last,' I exclaimed, pointing them out to Donello, 'we're all right now.' It was when we got nearer, and I caught sight of the stars-and-stripes flying from a flag-staff in the village, that I realised that it was *not* all right, and that I was upon an enemy's soil. To Donello it mattered nothing, for he was an Italian, as indeed were nearly all those who had escaped from the wrecked vessel. I had been the only Englishman on board.

"It was now that in my despair I suggested that I should endeavour to make my escape from this hostile coast, if it were possible to do so. The prospect of an American prison was anything but pleasant, and I shuddered at the very idea.

"We were on the outskirts of the village, but had not as yet met any of the inhabitants. Near the spot where we were standing was a small wood, and Donello suggested that we should hide ourselves in it for a time and talk



"We've been shipwrecked upon your coast during the night," I said to him.

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over plans for the future. This seemed a wise precaution, and in a few seconds we had ensconced ourselves amidst the rather dense underwood that grew beneath the trees, and quite imagined that we were safe from observation. We had not been there for more than a quarter of an hour, however, before a man with a wallet slung over his shoulder, and carrying a hatchet in his hand, entered the wood and began looking about for some tree that he had to fell. As ill-luck would have it, he almost stumbled over us, and seemed at first not a little alarmed at finding two suspicious-looking strangers crouching amongst the underwood.

“‘I’d better tell him everything, and ask for his protection,’ I said hurriedly to Donello. ‘I dare say he’s an honest fellow, and will aid us to escape into Canada.’”

“We sprang to our feet, and confronted the stranger.”

“‘We’ve been shipwrecked upon your coast

during the night,' I said to him, 'and are anxious to get food and shelter. Perhaps you can kindly assist us, and we will gladly pay a reasonable sum in return.'

"Fortunately I was able to make this offer, for I had secured some money before leaving the vessel, and so I knew had Donello.

"The new-comer did not answer me at once.

"'I guess you're an Englishman, stranger!' he said at length, eyeing me keenly.

"I did not altogether like the expression on the man's face. It was crafty, and even perhaps cruel. It was now too late to draw back, however.

"'Yes, I'm an Englishman,' I said, looking him straight in the face, 'and my companion is an Italian. We wish to find our way across the frontier into Canada, and will liberally reward any one who assists us.'

"I fancied I saw a look of cupidity in the American's eyes.

"'I'll boss you through it,' he said, giving

me a series of winks. 'You must lie low in one o' my sheds behind the shanty, and then when it gets a bit dark I reckon I'll do scout for you as well as any of them scalp-taking Red Indians.'

"Well, we followed our guide, who led us by a beaten track to his shanty, which was situated on the outskirts of a pinewood about a quarter of a mile from the village. It was a secluded spot, which of course was fortunate.

"Our guide opened the rough, ill-fitting door of a shed behind the house.

"'You'll find some straw there to lie upon,' he said, 'and you're not likely to be disturbed. My old woman will bring you along something to eat presently, but I'm afraid I ain't got no dry duds to offer you, as the clothes I stands up in are the only ones I possess!'

"I thanked the man for his services, and gave him a crown piece as an earnest of something more solid that was to follow. He at once withdrew to the house to give orders for our

breakfast, having carefully closed the door of the shed behind him. We threw ourselves down upon the straw, and commenced discussing the situation, and passing rather unfavourable comments upon our guide.

“‘I think he shall betray us for a large reward,’ said Donello, ‘so we must discharge plenty dollars into his rascal pocket to keep him for our side.’

“The shed was dark and rather stuffy, as it possessed no window, but a certain amount of air and light penetrated through the crevices in the planking of which it was built. We would have given a good deal for a change of clothes, for we were shivering with the cold of our damp clinging garments, the morning sun not having been sufficiently powerful to dry them.

“Presently a stout good-natured looking dame brought us a couple of basins of steaming oatmeal porridge and a jug of fresh milk. I discovered by her brogue that she was an Irishwoman, and after thanking her for the porridge, asked if we

might not presently dry ourselves by her fire. She seemed greatly alarmed at this request, and said that we must on no account stir from our hiding-place for fear of being seen by some of the authorities, who, she affirmed, were very much incensed with the English people.

“When the dame had left us, I implored Donello to leave me, and make the best of his way to Canada alone, for it occurred to me that he was running a great risk in linking his present fortunes with mine. As an Italian, he could make his way through the American States without fear of annoyance or molestation, and I assured him that I would endeavour to rejoin him in Canada later on, if I could manage to outwit the Yankees. To these propositions of mine my friend turned a deaf ear, saying that nothing on earth would deter him from sharing all my perils and adventures, and that he felt convinced that all would be well, and that our host would put us in the way of leaving the country so long as we paid him

lavishly. I was very much touched by this devotion on the part of my Italian friend, and was really thankful for his companionship, as you may imagine.

“Slowly and wearily the day passed. We tried to sleep, but anxiety kept us wakeful. In the evening the woodman entered the shed, and informed us that we should make a start about half-an-hour after midnight, as the moon—then on the wane—would rise about that time. He added that he knew the country thoroughly well, and would guide us safely to the Canadian frontier, which was only thirteen miles distant in a north-westerly direction.

“We supped off some pickled pork and stale bread, and a draught of goat’s milk, and then Donello proposed that we should try and get forty winks. I agreed to this most willingly, for I felt thoroughly exhausted by all I had gone through. In a few moments we were both fast asleep. How long I had been sleeping I do not know, but I was awakened by

the pattering sound of heavy rain upon the shingled roof of the shed. Then some heavy drops leaked through some hole above my head and fell in a very unpleasant stream upon my face. Thoroughly roused by this, I shifted my position upon the straw, and without arousing Donello—who was a very heavy sleeper—managed to find a dry and comfortable resting-place a considerable distance away. In vain I tried to get to sleep again. My brain seemed to be in a whirl, and I felt hot and feverish. Suddenly I heard a low creaking sound, as if a door was turning upon its hinges. It was very dark and I could see nothing. I listened intently, but all had become quiet again. ‘It was a rat,’ I said to myself, ‘there are sure to be lots of them about here.’ A minute or two elapsed, and I again heard the same sound. Then I fancied I detected the tread of a stealthy footfall within the shed, and a glimmer of light from the direction of the doorway. My heart beat like a steam-engine. I felt certain that

some one had entered our hiding-place with evil intent, and my suspicions instantly fell upon the woodman. As these thoughts flashed through my mind I heard the sound of a heavy blow which seemed to descend upon the straw, and this was followed by a half-muffled cry of disappointed rage. I gave a loud shout to awaken Donello, and sprang to my feet. At the same moment a lantern was flashed upon us out of the darkness, and I beheld our ruffianly host vainly endeavouring to extricate a knife which had become deeply imbedded in the earthen floor of the shed. In a moment it flashed across me what had happened. The woodman had endeavoured to murder me with a view to robbery, intending no doubt to treat my friend in the same way, but through my having shifted my position, had miscalculated my whereabouts, being afraid to use his lantern for fear of arousing us. As I flew at the man with the intention of trying to disarm him, Donello awoke, and instantly grasping the situa-

tion flew to my assistance. The woodman gave a violent wrench to the knife, and then finding he could not loosen it, drew a pistol from his pocket, but before he could use this deadly weapon, I had pounced upon him, and wrenched it from his grasp. 'Shoot him!' exclaimed Donello, rushing to my side. I covered the rascal with the pistol, and though he was a man of enormous strength, he was cowed by the sight of the gleaming barrel held so close to his head. Donello with great coolness snatched the lantern from the man's grasp, for he was afraid of the rascal extinguishing the light, and escaping in the darkness. 'You wretch!' I exclaimed, 'it would serve you right to put a bullet through your brain, and if you make the least attempt at violence I shall do it without a moment's hesitation.'

"Well, the fellow was as humble as could be, and promised faithfully to act as guide if we would trust him, and declared that he would accept no reward for conducting us to the

frontier, saying that we could keep the loaded pistol and shoot him if he played us false. We were foolish enough to believe this mean, dastardly wretch, and he conducted us to what he declared was a Canadian homestead on the British side of the frontier. In reality it was nothing more or less than the house of the sheriff of his own State, and before we could shoot the villain, or take any steps to effect an escape, we were seized, and in spite of our struggles, handcuffed and thrust into prison. The next day Donello was released, being an Italian subject, and I was impressed for the naval service, and in the calmest way sent on board the *Chesapeake* to form a member of her crew. Well, you know all the rest, Ernest, so, like a good fellow, tell the steward to bring me some supper, for I'm most awfully peckish, and I dare say you are too."

Only a few weeks after this conversation took place, there was immense rejoicing in the ancestral halls of Hazeldene, for the wandering

heir had returned in safety to his loving parents, whose joy and delight at his sudden and unexpected reappearance I must leave to my readers' imaginations. It was not long, too, before Ernest Durrant put in an appearance in Devonshire, for the *Shannon* returned to Plymouth to refit and take in stores, and then the brothers enjoyed many a ride and ramble together amidst their well-known haunts in the oak-studded park of Hazeldene. Sir Henry and Lady Durrant, overflowing with gratitude and kindness of heart, gave a grand dance and spread to all their tenants and humble neighbours—and all went as merry as the proverbial marriage-bell.

It will suffice to add that Hugh remained at home and pursued his studies under a tutor, eventually succeeding to the baronetcy; whilst Ernest developed into a dashing young naval commander, full of fire and enthusiasm, and devoted to his noble profession.

SLAVERS, AHOY!

SLAVERS, AHOY!

CHAPTER I.

JACK'S BAPTISM OF FIRE.



HER Majesty's corvette, *Snarler*, was lying serenely at anchor in the placid waters of the Zanzibar roadstead. It was the witching hour of sunset, and the gorgeous tints of the western sky were bathing the far-stretching sea, the low palm-clad island, and the extensive and picturesque town of Zanzibar in a flood of golden and ruby light. From the Sultan's lofty palace, guarded by its sea-forts, the blood-red flag had been hauled down to signify that the brief tropical twilight was about to usher in the gloomy shades of night; and for the same reason the fluttering white ensign, which had but lately flown from the flagstaff of the *Snarler*, had been stowed

away by the signalman of the watch in its own proper locker. Everything was suggestive of repose and of a cessation from toil, but the British seaman never knows for certain that he may count upon a peaceful night. At any moment, either by day or night, the drum may suddenly beat to quarters, the fire-bell may ring out its startling summons, or the boatswain pipe the boats' crews away to man and arm boats.

On the tawny strand, just below the mission-house, and opposite the spot where the British man-of-war lay idly upon the waters, stood a young midshipman, apparently waiting for a boat to take him off to his floating home. He was gazing admiringly at the resplendent but fast fading sunset sky, and at the dim purple stretch of coast in the distance, which showed where the great dark continent jutted out into the surf-crested rollers of the vast Indian Ocean.

A bright, frank, daring-looking boy of sixteen was Jack Trelawny, with fair hair and dark grey eyes. Tall and slim, his well-knit frame yet gave promise of considerable strength and activity.

"No chance of a ship's boat, I'm afraid," he ejaculated, after letting his eyes rest for some moments upon the *Snarler*. "I'll just take a shore-boat, or I shall be late for the gun-room supper."

As he turned to hail some of the native boatmen who were loafing about at no great distance, his eye fell upon a smartly-attired Arab, who was approaching him at a swift pace from the direction of the town. "Hullo! there's the interpreter," observed the middy. "I wonder what he's in such a hurry about!"

In a few moments Ahmed, the Arab interpreter of the corvette, had gained young Trelawny's side, his dark olive face flushed from his exertions, and his sombre Oriental eyes alight with a subdued excitement.

"You got boat, sar? I must go off to de ship at once wid most important news for de captain," he panted out.

"You can come off in my shore-boat, Ahmed; here she is! Jump in, and tell the boatmen to give way like one o'clock," was the middy's prompt response.

In another moment the canoe was darting over the phosphorescent waters at a rapid pace, the swarthy rowers looking as black as jet against the dying gleams of the radiant west.

"What's the news, Ahmed?" demanded the middy, as soon as he had seen that the boat was heading in the right direction.

"Two slaver, sar, come up de coast dis bery night. What do you tink ob dat, eh?"

"Think of it? I think it's splendid!" answered young Trelawny with flashing eyes. "How did you hear of it, you old sinner?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the interpreter, jerking a thumb with an expressive gesture over his shoulder in the direction of the town; "dat my secret, Massa Trelawny. De fact is, I got plenty ob friend in de bazaar ober der, and dey talk, talk, talk, like so many parrot, specially when dey hab a drop or two ob arrack down der throat. Oh yes, dey talk, and tink no one hear dem, de foolis' people dat dey is!"

"We shall weigh anchor at once, and go in chase of them, I suppose," observed the middy

thoughtfully ; "this *will* be good news for the other fellows in the gun-room."

At this moment the boat dashed alongside under the corvette's frowning guns, and young Trelawny hastily scrambled up the side, closely followed by the radiant Ahmed, who was burning to disclose his weighty secret to Captain Johnstone.

Two hours later the corvette had quitted her anchorage, and was rapidly steaming out to sea. It had been deemed wiser not to weigh anchor till after nightfall, so that no alarm should be given to any possible friends of the expected slavers, whose suspicions would to a certainty have been aroused had they seen the corvette thus suddenly leave the roadstead.

With what an eager step did Jack Trelawny pace the quarter-deck during the first watch that night, which it happened to be his duty to keep. Although the *Snarler* had been for some time employed in suppressing the detestable slave traffic upon the east coast of Africa, she had been singularly unfortunate during this

particular cruise, and had not succeeded in effecting a single capture, much to the disgust of both officers and ship's company. Loving all daring adventure with the eagerness and thoughtlessness of boyhood, the middy was only too ready to embark in any enterprise that was set on foot, and he had already learned with much satisfaction from his coxswain that the first-cutter—his particular joy and pride—was to take part in the projected attack upon the two slavers.

Half-hour after half-hour the ship's bell rang out its sullen strokes. A keen look-out was kept by the bluejackets on the forecastle, but no lights were burned for fear of giving an alarm to the slavers, the crews of which were certain to be very much on the alert now that they had reached the ordinary cruising grounds of the men-of-war. The night was very dark during the early hours, for the moon was on the wane, and would not rise till midnight. The sky, however, was clear, and the magnificent stars scintillated and flashed out of the blue-black vault of heaven in diamond clusters of ever-varying radiance.

At six bells — eleven o'clock — the serrated heights of the African coast loomed huge and indistinct into view, and "Land ho!" resounded along the upper deck of the *Snarler*. Leads-men were in the chains, chanting the soundings in loud but musical tones, and it now became evident that the water was shoaling.

"Mr. Trelawny!" sung out the officer of the watch from the bridge, "run forward and see that the bower-anchors are ready for letting go."

"Ay, ay, sir."

At this moment the captain came on deck, went into the chart-house with the lieutenant on duty; and then emerging, gazed long and anxiously at the looming coastline through a powerful pair of night-glasses.

"Reduce to half-speed, Eliot," he said to the lieutenant laconically.

The order was quickly telegraphed to the engine-room, and the corvette's way visibly slackened. All was now excitement on board. Not an officer or seaman had attempted to court even the proverbial forty winks, for they knew

not what the hours of the eventful night would bring forth. A general fear was expressed that the slave-dhows might slip by in the darkness before the moon rose, but Ahmed's information enabled him to keep a light heart, for he knew that the steady S.W. monsoon breeze would sweep up the expected vessels right into the open jaws of the *Snarler's* boats at about 2 A.M. Nor was the astute Arab far out in his calculations, as we shall see.

Soon after the corvette had anchored in fifteen fathoms to leeward of a lofty projecting cape, an orange-coloured distorted moon slowly raised her horns above the eastern horizon-line, and gradually silvered her disc and increased her illuminating power as she sheared her way upwards through the lower stratas of the atmosphere, and shed a mild radiance over land and sea.

How many anxious eyes were scanning the ocean at this moment, watching for the first ghostly gleam of the dhow's tall picturesque lateen sails, which the moon's rays would be sure to divulge upon such a clear night as this.

Presently three ships' boats might have been seen heading out to sea. They had been despatched from the corvette to patrol the coast-line, and with orders to intercept, board, and capture the two slave-dhows, should the latter appear upon the scene.

The first cutter formed part of this little flotilla, and in the stern sheets of the boat sat our youthful hero, Jack Trelawny, armed with sword and revolver. His crew, composed of ten stalwart seamen, had cutlasses buckled on around their waists, and pistols stuck into their belts. They were pulling with long steady strokes, and as the blades of their oars dipped into the water, it was as if they were being plunged into liquid fire, so bright was the phosphorescent light.

Young Trelawny's face was a picture, as he kept earnestly gazing in a southerly direction through a pair of night-glasses. The flush of excitement was on his brow and cheek, and the soft lingering light of the moon lent an almost ethereal and radiant beauty to his handsome boyish features, and slim graceful form.

"Will they *ever* heave into sight?" he exclaimed impatiently to his coxswain, who was perched up in the stern, holding the tiller. "Can the interpreter have made a mistake, do you think, Fidder?"

"Not he, sir; he's the cutest fellow I ever came across in the way of a native. You may stake a week's grog that he ain't far out in any job of this sort, for he's got the cunning of a born serpent."

"I'm glad to hear it," said our midddy, "for if there's one thing I've been longing for more than another since we arrived upon this station, it is to meet and punish some of these rascally slaver people."

"They're a bad lot, sir, surely," replied the coxswain, changing his quid; "and I reckon we're the boys to give it 'em hot if so be as we runs athwart 'em."

"Ay, that we are!" chimed in one of the crew in low hoarse tones; "let 'em try a rough-and-tumble with the saucy *Snarler* boys, that's all!"

"These Arab slave-dealers are a lot of cruel

and utterly heartless wretches," said Jack Trelawny indignantly, "and they all deserve to be strung up to the yard-arm, instead of being put ashore to do and go where they like. No doubt they soon get together another human cargo, and ship the poor kidnapped wretches off to Muscat or the Persian Gulf."

The middy's eyes flashed as he spoke, for he was one of those noble-hearted boys—rare enough, alas!—who felt it one of his missions in life to use every endeavour to stamp out oppression and tyranny wherever met with.

Oppression and tyranny are not vices common to the predatory Arab alone, and even members of so-called civilised communities are forced to blush when they peruse the history of their respective countries.

"There they are!" exclaimed our hero suddenly, "just heaving into sight round that point."

"Right you are, sir," said the coxswain, with much subdued excitement in his tone; "'tis a couple of dhows, sure enough."

Ahmed had not erred. It really was the

slavers, and they were moving along with flowing sheets swiftly and silently, their reeking holds filled with poor emaciated Africans, who had been ruthlessly torn from their native villages amid the shadowy forests of the mysterious African continent.

Not perceiving the corvette, which was hidden from their view by the projecting cape, the captains of the slavers resolved to hold on their course, and bid defiance to the flotilla of boats; which latter in the dim light, and on the great expanse of sea, appeared to them as mere cockle-shells hardly worthy of much serious notice.

Our middy steered his cutter so as to intercept the largest of the dhows, and he had the satisfaction of seeing that he was some way ahead of the *Snarler's* other boats.

On came the old-fashioned-looking high-pooped dhow, with her great inflated sail lit up by the vivid rays of the moon, and churning up the waters into a broad wake of creamy foam, which bubbled and hissed away astern in millions of little angry whirlpools. She

appeared to be crowded with men, some of whom opened a desultory and perfectly innocuous fire of musketry upon the cutter's crew.

"If I could pick off that there long lanky fellow at the tiller," observed Fiddler, with consummate coolness, "I reckon we'd be alongside in a jiffey."

"Here you are, mate," said one of the stroke-oarsmen, as he handed up a rifle.

Jack Trelawny's eyes sparkled with excitement as he looked to his revolver, and loosened his sword in its sheath. The critical moment was at hand, and his heart was beating—oh! so rapidly. Never before had he had the chance of being under fire. It was to be his war-baptism, and he muttered a silent prayer that he might do honour to his country's flag.

The two crafts were now fast approaching each other. With a grim and determined smile, Fiddler levelled his rifle and fired, whilst young Trelawny seized the tiller.

"Shiver my timbers if he ain't dropped him!" one of the seamen exclaimed enthusiastically.

It was only too true. The dhow's helmsman

had disappeared, and there seemed to be great confusion on board as the vessel fell off from her course.

“Give way, my brave lads!” shouted Jack Trelawny; “shove her alongside, and she’s your prize.”

In a few moments the cutter had grappled with her clumsy antagonist, and headed by our plucky young hero, the seamen were swarming up over the lofty bulwarks. But it was no child’s play for them, for the Arabs had recovered from their partial panic, and presenting a determined front, formed in line along the dhow’s side, waving their spears and scimitars, and uttering cries of defiance.

At the first onset young Trelawny was knocked backwards by a blow from the butt-end of a musket, and fell across the gunwale of the cutter; but he was quickly on his legs again, none the worse for the shock, and as his stalwart men had now resolutely forced their way on board, he found no difficulty in gaining the slaver’s deck. When the Arab

elects to fight, however, he proves a tough and obstinate foe; and so it proved upon this occasion, for the slavers had much at stake, and were led by a ruthless and determined chief, noted for his cruelty, and his hatred of the English—who had several times intercepted and confiscated his human cargoes. Fired by this man's example, the lawless Arabs fought with bravery and desperation, and the seamen encountered foes worthy of their steel, which was seldom the case on these occasions.

The instant that our hero reached the slaver's deck, he was attacked by two malevolent-looking desperadoes armed with spears and clubs, who endeavoured to rush in and close with him. With great coolness, however, Trelawny covered one of his antagonists with his revolver, and succeeded in lodging a bullet in the fellow's right shoulder, which partially disabled him. As he was about to turn his revolver upon the other Arab, in hopes of rendering him also *hors-de-combat*, that weapon was struck from his hand by a sudden blow from a massive

spear wielded by a third Arab who had joined in the combat. Before our hero could draw his sword, this man made a fierce lunge at him with his deadly-looking weapon, but this blow the middy dexterously avoided by stepping aside, and having in the meantime got his blade free from its scabbard, he promptly ran it through the spearman's body before that doughty warrior could recover himself. The next moment he felt himself gripped round the body in a herculean grasp, and found that an unarmed member of the slaver's crew had evidently taken this opportunity to endeavour to disarm him and take him prisoner. Forced to quit his hold of the sword, the blade of which he had not had time to withdraw from the body of his vanquished opponent, Jack Trelawny turned fiercely upon his fresh antagonist, and endeavoured to get a firm grip of his lithe slippery body—the remaining Arabs having turned to attack some of the cutter's crew who had approached them in the general *mêlée*.



The next moment he felt himself gripped round the body in a herculean grasp.
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CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE SAIL.



EVER had our hero more cause to be thankful for the fact that he was a Cornishman by birth, and had been taught the art of wrestling from his childhood. His Arab opponent was a heavy muscular man, and yet full of activity; but these qualities did not stand him in the stead of science, and after some convulsive writhings and prodigious efforts of sheer brute strength, he was flung heavily to the deck by his young antagonist, who was nevertheless considerably exhausted by the struggle. Some bluejackets now ran up to the spot, and assisted their plucky midshipman to make the fallen man prisoner.

The conflict was now at an end, and the dhow was in the hands of the first cutter's crew—the Arabs who had not been killed or

driven overboard, having laid down their arms and begged for quarter. A hundred and twenty wretched slaves were found in the hold, many of them more dead than alive. The joy of these poor creatures on finding themselves free was excessive, for they had been filled with gloomy fears as to what their ultimate fate would be. A great number of them were mere skeletons, having been almost starved by their cruel captors during the voyage.

As Trelawny was attending to some of his wounded men—whose hurts, however, were not serious—Fidder came running up excitedly.

“Have you seen that third dhow, sir?” he asked; “she has evidently stolen by whilst we were attacking these here swabs, and I’m bothered if I don’t think she’ll escape if we don’t look slippery.”

Jack sprang to his feet, and glanced in the direction which his coxswain was indicating. There indeed was a dhow stealing along the coast some way to the northward, the sheen

of the moonlight glistening on her lofty lateen sail.

“How annoying!” cried our hero; “no doubt she is a slaver too, and has nicely hoodwinked us, but I really think we might still overhaul her if we gave chase at once.”

“T’other boats don’t seem to have twigged how matters stand,” said the coxswain, “but I suppose, like us, they’ve had their work cut out for ’em.”

Jack Trelawny turned to look at the dhow which the second cutter and the gig had gone to attack. She was about half-a-mile distant, and was rolling about on the land-swell with her yards lowered. Just as Jack’s eyes fell upon her he saw a small boat shoot from her side and pull in his direction across the glittering waters.

“That’s the gig,” he said to Fidler, pointing her out eagerly. “I shall ask her crew to take possession of our prize so as to let us go in chase of the escaping dhow.”

“Very good idea, sir!” answered Fidler

approvingly; "a starn chase is always a long one, but the breeze is fair, and we can put our cutter under canvas, and be after the rascals with a flowing sheet. It wouldn't surprise me to see them swabs of Arabs get becalmed when they're a bit more inshore, and then we might come up hand-over-fist with 'em."

"I'm only afraid of their running their craft ashore to avoid capture," said Jack, levelling his night-glasses at the retreating dhow; "as you know, it's a favourite device of theirs, and we couldn't follow them on account of the heavy surf."

"I wish we had a boat-gun," observed Fidler, "then we might manage to cripple her when we got within range, and so prevent her doing anything of that sort."

A few minutes later the *Snarler's* gig dashed alongside Jack Trelawny's prize. A young midddy was in the boat, and he at once leaped on board, whilst his men hung on with their boathooks, and exchanged remarks with their shipmates of the first cutter.

“The second lieutenant has sent me to order you to go in chase of that other dhow,” said the midddy to Jack; “what a lucky fellow you are to have the chance of another scrimmage.”

“I’m ready to go off at once,” exclaimed our hero, “but I want you to do two things for me, like a good fellow. One is to lend me a couple of men in place of two of my wounded blue-jackets, and the other is to take charge of this dhow and the slaves on board her.”

“Well, as a fact, that’s what I’ve got orders to do,” answered the midddy in rather a doleful tone, “and there’s no choice in the matter; so off you go, old chap, and see if you can’t secure us a little more prize-money.”

Jack hurriedly collected his men, and ordered them into the cutter, whilst his messmate prepared to take the slaver in tow with the gig.

“Step the mast, my hearties!” shouted Fiddler, as he jumped into the cutter, “and see the lugsail all clear for hoisting.”

The men were only too pleased at having the chance of further adventures, and set to work

with great alacrity to obey their coxswain's orders.

"Shove off forward!" sung out Jack, as he waved an adieu to his brother midgy on board the dhow. "Hoist away!"

The cutter glided away across the moonlit waters as the night breeze inflated her lugsail, and the great black dhow, looking abnormally huge in the faint light, was soon left far astern, though for some considerable time the voices of those on board her, and the creaking and cheeping of blocks, oars, and spars came sounding across the ever-widening waste of waters in a somewhat ghostly manner.

"She's slipping along in fine style," observed our hero approvingly, as he glanced over the cutter's gunwale, "and, if anything, the breeze seems inclined to freshen."

Fidder was in high delight, and his eye travelled quickly from his own canvas to that of the mysterious dhow, which was now about three miles distant.

"You're quite right, sir," he said, shoving a

quid of tobacco into his mouth; "if this here little breeze only sticks to us, we'll overhaul her in fust-rate style. It appears to me as if she was in a belt of calm at this moment, but maybe the swabs have got sweeps aboard, and will man 'em. 'Tain't easy to circumwent the skipper of an Arab slave-dhow, for they've got their ugly noddles screwed on the right way as a rule."

For some time Jack Trelawny observed the chase steadily through his night-glasses. As near as possible she bore a couple of points on the port-bow, and did not appear to be more than a mile or so from the shore. In the dim distance, and straight ahead of her, a lofty promontory, grim and grey, rose up in long bold outline against the violet star-studded sky.

"Yes, they've got sweeps out," said Jack, as soon as his scrutiny was ended, "and are heading her out more to sea. I think they must have got swept inshore by an unknown current, so we must take care we don't get drifted in the same way."

"The more the dhow manœuvres about the more likely we are to catch her," said Fidler, as

he shifted the tiller a little. "I wonder if the swabs have seen us yet!"

"I'm certain they have," said Jack emphatically, "you see they're very high out of the water, and consequently can see a long distance. The moonlight on our sail would alone be enough to betray us."

Under the influence of a number of long heavy sweeps, the dhow was gliding out from her belt of calm into the region of breeze-swept water. It was evident that her captain did not entertain any idea at present of running her ashore—believing, no doubt, that he could show the man-of-war's boat a clean pair of heels as soon as he was once more under the genial influence of the south-westerly currents of air. Slowly but surely, however, the cutter was creeping up to her rival, dashing the foam from her shapely bow, and leaving a long line of bubbling, hissing wake astern which glistened like liquid silver in the beams of the waning moon.

Half-an-hour passed, and the distance between pursuer and pursued could not be reckoned at

more than a mile and a half. But the dhow had now got well into the swing of the breeze, and, after carefully watching her for some time, both Jack and his coxswain came to the conclusion that they were no longer gaining upon her. The lofty lateen sail held a great deal of wind, and though the dhow looked a lubberly, unwieldy vessel, with her high stern and Dutch-built beam, she nevertheless "walked the waters like a thing of life," and glided steadily along with her sharp projecting cutwater pointing straight in the direction of the cape which jutted out into the sea, to the northward.

It was very tantalising to the bluejackets, but they were not easily discouraged, and cracked jokes and sang snatches of song as they sat about on the thwarts, glancing under the foot of the foresail every now and again to see how the chase bore.

The breeze was slightly stronger than it had been at first, but as it was almost dead aft, it was not necessary to take a reef in the sail. The sky was still clear, and there was no sign

of any change in the weather. The moon was approaching the meridian, and poured a flood of beams upon the restless sea. The milk-white surf fell with a booming crash upon the steep boulder-strewn strand, and its thunder came faintly to the ears of those in the cutter.

"We are neither gaining nor losing," said Jack to his coxswain, after a long silence. "Shall we douse the sail with water, or get some oars out and pull?"

"I think we'll try both, sir," said Fidler, with a laugh. "Chuck some water over the foresail with a baler, lads," he continued, "and stand by to get your oars out. You've had a good spell of rest now."

With this extra aid of saturated canvas and the efforts of ten stalwart oarsmen, the cutter seemed to fly over the waters; and the blue-jackets cheered and sang with redoubled energy as they marked the rate at which she was going.

"Can you see through your glass, sir, if the slaver's people have still got their sweeps out?" asked Fidler.

Jack peered intently at the chase for a few moments.

"No, they haven't," he answered. "I expect they think they've got the heels of us just now, and that there's no necessity to over-exert themselves; but if I'm not mistaken, we're beginning to overhaul them again now."

"There's no doubt of it," said Fidler, glancing over the gunwale at the hissing foam and spume; "we'll be giving the rascals a tow-rope within an hour, barring accidents!"

"Give way with a will, bully-boys!" shouted one of the stroke-oarsmen. "'Lift her along, stout hearts and strong.'"

It was not long before the captain of the slaver perceived that he was being outsailed by the *Snarler's* cutter, and he then proceeded to get out his sweeps again. These latter, however, were not of very much use in an emergency, owing to the lofty bulwarks of the dhow, which handicapped the oarsmen to a very great extent, and prevented their getting a proper grip of the water.

“Blest if she ain’t altered course!” sung out Fidler excitedly. “I reckon they’re beginning to funk it, and are going to head for the shore.”

“How tiresome!” exclaimed Jack, “it’s possible now that she may escape by running through the surf on to the beach. We couldn’t possibly follow her without running tremendous risks.”

The cutter’s course was altered, and every effort made by her crew to urge her forward at a still higher speed.

The Arabs were evidently desperate, and intended to sacrifice their vessel in order to prevent their ill-gotten cargo of slaves falling into the hands of the British seamen.

The change in the course of the two vessels—bringing the wind farther abeam—appeared to give the dhow an advantage, and she slowly drew away from the pursuing cutter, much to the disappointment of our sailor friends.

Jack was very busy with his glasses, and Fidler kept up a string of encouraging shouts

to the toiling members of the crew, who had now thrown off their jumpers and were pulling in their flannels.

Half-an-hour passed, and the dhow had increased her distance by at least half-a-mile, and was still steering straight for the shore. The grim coastline, with its forbidding-looking cliffs cleft with fissures and ravines, and bare of all vegetation, now rose lofty and with clear bold outline against the midnight sky; and the roar of the thundering surges, as they leaped wildly upon the shelving strand, came distinctly to the ear across the vast undulations of the land swell.

“The dhow seems making for that spit of sandy shore yonder,” said Fidler; “now I’d give twopence to know if there’s anything the other side of it.”

“The coastline is rather broken in that direction,” observed Jack, turning his night-glasses upon it. “I suppose there’s no harbour or river hereabouts.”

“I ain’t seen no chart of this here out-

landish coast, so can't say, sir," answered the coxswain, whose face wore a rather uneasy expression. "There's only one thing quite sartin, and that is, that where that there dhow can go we can follow, for she draws a sight more water than what we do."

"That's true," assented Jack. "The only way she can outwit us is by running ashore, and disembarking her slaves."

"Shiver my blessed timbers if she ain't disappeared!" excitedly cried Fidler, a few moments later. "That ain't shipshape, in my opinion, mates!"

Every one strained their eyes in the direction in which the coxswain was intently staring, but nothing could they see but the outlying spit of land, and the lofty serrated cliffs which towered up in the background. The dhow they had been so assiduously pursuing had entirely vanished from their ken.

"Why, she must be a phantom craft, first cousin to the Flying Dutchman!" cried Jack Trelawny, levelling his glasses in the direction

of the sandy spit which bore a little on the port bow ; “ I was watching her not five minutes ago, and thinking that we had begun to gain a little on her.”

“ I reckon she’ve dodged behind the point, sir,” said Fidler, “ and all I’ve got to say is, I hope that none of the natives of these parts are in league with them ; for between the one party and the t’other they might play us a dirty trick when we gets a bit nearer the shore.”

“ How many rifles have we got in the boat ? ” demanded Jack anxiously.

“ Ten, sir,” answered one of the men, “ and plenty of ammunition.”

“ Pass them aft here to me,” said the middy, seizing some cartridges which were in a case in the stern sheets.

Having carefully loaded the rifles, Jack laid them down in the stern sheets that they might be ready for use at a moment’s notice.

The wind was falling light as the cutter approached the land, which was very tantalising to our friends. Occasionally the foresail flapped

against the mast, and then swelled out once more to a light draught of air which came in catpaws over the glimmering deep. The land swell was heavy, and also helped to impede the progress of the boat. The crew pulled strongly and steadily, the moonlight glistening brightly on the dripping blades of their oars as they flashed in and out of the water.

“The wind will fail us altogether in a very short time,” observed Fidder, anxiously glancing astern; “and then that there first cousin to the Flying Dutchman will score heavily, for her lateen sail is such a height it’ll catch a few faint breaths of wind from aloft when it’s a stark calm upon the sea.”

“Never mind!” said Jack cheerily. “I’ll back our oarsmen against hers any day; and it’s just possible that when we get around that point we shall be able to pepper them with a rifle, as a gentle hint to heave-to and show their papers.”

“A pretty tidy sell ’twould be for us if she turns out to be a regular trader, after all,” said Fidder, with a grin.

“Not much chance of that!” exclaimed the middy; “I feel sure that she originally belonged to the squadron of slavers we were sent to intercept.”

“It may be so, sir, and I don’t want to be a croaker, but if I’m not mistaken you yourself told me that the interpreter only expected to encounter *two* slavers. Of course I don’t know where he got his information from, or what it’s worth.”

“Now you mention it, I believe he *did* say two slavers,” assented Jack, in a disappointed tone. “He heard the news in the bazaars at Zanzibar, I know; but of course his informants may easily have made a mistake as to the number of vessels. If this dhow is not a slaver, why should she try so very hard to avoid us?”

“If her skipper have heard some of the queer yarns that go about our lower deck there might be a reason for it,” observed Fidler mysteriously.

One or two of the cutter’s crew laughed rather boisterously.

“What yarns?” asked Jack eagerly. “It’s not a secret, I suppose, is it?”

“Well, I s’pose there’s no harm in my mentioning of it,” said Fidder, “for likely enough it’s been talked about in the gunroom too, and you’ll say it’s terrible stale news. The story what’s going about is that the commanders of the *Canopus* and the *Sturdy* are as mad as March hares, and seize and condemn every dhow they come across, whether she’s a slaver or not.”

“I’ve heard rumours of that kind,” said Jack, “but I don’t know whether——”

The middy’s speech remained unfinished, for at that moment a flash issued from amid some boulders on the spit of land behind which the dhow had disappeared, and which the cutter was now approaching.

A bullet whizzed ominously near Jack Trelawny’s head.

“Ha! there are some skulking swabs of natives concealed among them rocks, I take it,” exclaimed Fidder angrily; “and they intend to annoy us, that’s sartin.”

Jack snatched up a rifle.

“Port a little!” he cried to his coxswain; “we must give that point as wide a berth as we can, for it is evident that some of the Somalis are in league with the slaver people, as you thought might be the case, Fidler.”

As Jack spoke he thought he caught sight of a dark figure dodging about amongst the rocks on shore, and at once levelled his rifle and fired. The smoke that gushed from the barrel obscured his vision for a few moments, and when it cleared away, the object—whatever it might have been—had disappeared.

“I wonder if I hit him!” exclaimed Jack, reloading the rifle; “I wish the boat was a little bit steadier.”

The cutter was making a circuit to avoid the proximity of the dangerous spit of land, but before she could get out of range, flames again streamed from amidst the boulders, and several bullets splashed into the water close by.

“Muff-shots, aren’t they?” said Fidler contemptuously. “Kindly hand me up a rifle, sir,

and if another of the rascals shows himself, I'll pick him off, or take my pension and go and live ashore!"

At that moment a dark figure emerged from behind a rock, and stood revealed in the broad moonlight.

"Catch a hold of the tiller, sir!" cried the coxswain, hastily snatching the rifle from Jack's hand. He levelled the deadly barrel with great precision and fired. The figure on shore fell, and did not rise again.

There was no sound but the echoing reverberations from the discharged rifle, which leaped from rock to rock, and afar to the serrated ridges and fissured cliffs of that desolate shore, with weird effect.

CHAPTER III.

PURSUIT OF THE DHOW.



THE uncanny silence on shore did not for long prevail. Hideous yells and vindictive shouts rent the air, and several armed natives were seen darting about hither and thither amid the rocks, evidently in a high state of warlike excitement. Then a desultory, but perfectly innocuous, fire was opened upon the cutter, which was now at a considerable distance from the shore. The rocks seemed aflame for a few minutes, as the musketry was brought into play, and clouds of grey sulphurous smoke drifted slowly away to leeward on the gentle night breeze.

Two of the cutter's crew laid in their oars in obedience to orders from Jack, and assisted him in returning the enemy's fire. It was almost impossible, however, to tell whether any of the

enemy were hit or not, as they took very good care to keep well under cover.

In a few minutes the cutter was round the point, and though a dropping fire was kept up on both sides, it was evident that the range was now too great for much harm to be done to either party.

Both Jack Trelawny and his coxswain gave a shout of astonishment. On doubling the point, they had opened up the mouth of a narrow, but apparently deep and navigable river.

The moonlight was not strong enough to reveal everything, but it was evident that the banks on both sides were clothed with vegetation to a certain extent, although no human habitations were visible. Nor was the dhow anywhere to be seen.

“Well, this is the sort of thing takes a fellow flat aback!” exclaimed Fidler, “even if you’ve had a suspicion all along of the nature of the case. The dhow has gone up this river, that’s as sartin as anything can be, and we must do our bully best to capture and tow her out.”

“The skipper of the slaver was evidently well acquainted with the place,” observed Jack, “and I’m certain that the natives on this part of the coast are in league with him. Those fellows that opened fire upon us from the spit of land must have got the alarm somehow, or they wouldn’t have been in such a position at this time of night.”

The firing having now entirely ceased, the two sharpshooters resumed their oars. The sail was lowered and stowed away, there not being a breath of wind to ruffle the somewhat turbid waters of the river’s mouth.

“I suppose we are right to pursue the slaver up this unknown river,” said young Trelawny in somewhat anxious tones to his coxswain; “we may find ourselves in a hornet’s nest, and of course I don’t want to risk my men’s lives unnecessarily.”

“I think we shall be all right with a good boat under us, sir,” returned Fidler, “because if the worst comes to the worst we can beat a retreat out to sea again, and return with a

more powerful force; but to tell you the truth I don't think that's likely to happen. I've had to do with destroying hornets' nests many a time in the old country, and I reckon we'll make short work of this one."

The middy was cheered by his coxswain's confidence, for he knew that he was an able and tried man, who had seen much active service on slave-cruising expeditions.

"We'll go ahead then as fast as we can," he said, "and show these rascals of slave-dealers that we're not to be trifled with."

"The thing will be," said Fiddler, "to prevent the villains landing their slaves. They've got precious little start of us fortunately, and I hope we may be in time to choke their luff, so to speak."

Jack carefully examined his revolver to see if it was loaded.

"If we can't capture the slaves, we'll get the dhow and make a bonfire of her," he said; "they can't well prevent our doing that, at any rate."

"I fully expect to open up some sort of a village, or at any rate detached shanties," said Fidler, "as soon as we get fairly into the river. Them musketeers at the point have probably doubled back by this time to give an alarm, and we mustn't be surprised to get a bit of a peppering as we pull up between the narrow banks."

The cutter was now fast approaching the river. Some tall palms and other tropical trees lined the banks on either hand, and threw long dark shadows upon the sluggishly-moving stream. Beneath them were some straggling mangrove-bushes, whose roots formed serpentine interlacings amidst the foetid mud from which they chose to draw their sustenance. The light was indistinct and treacherous under the o'er-shadowing canopies of leaves, and there was an eerie silence, broken only by the croaking of frogs, and the occasional pathetic cry of some prowling jackal in search of a meal. The majority of the denizens of the forest were buried in slumber, but a night bird here and there flitted

on silent ghostly wing amidst the dark shadows of the trees and jungle-plants; and the bright fireflies flickered amongst the heavy foliage overhead in apparently never-ending mazes of insect revelry.

"How gloomy it looks!" said Trelawny, as the cutter glided under the sentinel trees which seemed to keep watch and ward over the silent waterway; "one might almost expect to see ghosts flitting about in the jungle yonder."

"I want to see summat a bit more substantial than ghosts," said Fidler, with a low laugh, and peering about him earnestly. "I expected to spot some native shanties amongst these trees at the river's mouth, but I'm jiggered if there's anything of the kind to be seen."

"I expect we shall come upon a village farther up," said Jack, who was sitting in the stern sheets with a loaded rifle laid across his knees. "It isn't likely a navigable river of this size is uninhabited."

The river took a bend not very far from its mouth, and so it was not possible at first to

see any great distance up its tree-shadowed waters. So far not even a fishing canoe had been sighted, and as for the mysterious dhow, there was not the slightest trace of her.

Gallantly the cutter's crew strained at their oars. Four of the men had been selected by Jack Trelawny to act as marksmen, and these fellows—who were noted shots—had loaded their rifles, and sat as still as statues upon the thwarts, well upon the alert for any eventuality. At any moment, they well knew, the dark recesses of the forest-lined banks might be weirdly lit up by the death-flames of innumerable muskets.

Fidder steered the cutter with great *sang-froid*, keeping her rather in towards the right bank so as to be clear of the strongest part of the current; for though the river was a sluggish one, the central part of the stream flowed with quite sufficient strength to materially impede the progress of a boat.

At a swinging pace the cutter swept around the bend of which we spoke just now. A long,

narrow, straight stretch of water was now revealed, lined on both banks with trees, shrubs, and water-plants, whose chequered shadows took strange fantastic shapes, as they lay in sharply-defined silhouettes upon the moving waters; their intensely black patches and outlines thrown out here and there in strong relief by the floods of silvery moonlight which poured in through some natural vista in the overhanging woods.

About a mile of water stretched away before the eyes of our friends, but they seemed alone upon a deserted river. There was no sign of life except in Nature's exuberance of tropical vegetation. The dhow still remained obstinately invisible.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Fidler, giving his thigh a tremendous blow with his fist.

"Are you?" asked Jack, with a laugh. "I hope it doesn't hurt, but I should think from the way you slapped yourself that it did."

"Ah, you're always fond of a bit of chaff, sir; but, 'pon my word, I do think it a queer start that there ain't no sign of the fust cousin to the

Flying Dutchman. It strikes me she's a cousin several times removed, and uncommon distant."

Young Trelawny started up in the boat in a state of great excitement.

"I'm sure I see a canoe, or a boat of some kind!" he exclaimed, pointing up the river. "Don't you see it, Fidler?—a black object just under that great palm-tree on the right bank."

"Yes, sir, I do; and a boat it is, sure enough, unless it's an alligator or a hippopotamus."

"I can make out the heads of two men in her," said Jack, peering away through his glass. "I suppose you'll want me to believe that they're two niggers riding a hippopotamus down the river by way of a spree!"

Fidler laughed.

"Give way, lads!" he shouted; "it's like enough we'll get some important news if these should happen to be fishermen."

"Perhaps they'll have been bribed to give us false information," suggested Jack sagely; "we must take all they say with a grain of salt!"

"If we can understand a word of their

heathenish lingo," said the coxswain. "I wish we had the interpreter with us, for he knows all the outlandish dialects of these nigger swabs. I know about a score of Somali words myself, but they won't be much good, I reckon."

The boat was now plainly visible, for she had shot out into the middle of the stream where the light was more distinct, and was evidently being paddled boldly down to meet the *Snarler's* cutter. She was a large roomy canoe, and was being propelled by two swarthy natives, evidently fishermen of the locality.

The cutter's crew laid on their oars as the canoe shot down to them within hailing distance. The moonlight glinted on the rifle barrels, and on the other arms and accoutrements, and lit up in a fitful manner the rugged determined features of the bluejackets.

Jack noted an awe-struck expression on the faces of the fishermen as they checked the way of their canoe, and glanced at the armed Englishmen. They proved to be by no means ill-looking men, and both Jack and his coxswain

came to the conclusion that they might be relied upon to give correct information. These swarthy fellows intimated by signs that they had some important news to communicate, but they knew not a word of English, which is hardly to be wondered at. By the help, however, of Fidler's very sparse vocabulary, and an abundance of gesticulatory signs, important intelligence of the mysterious dhow was gleaned. The fishermen were evidently no friends to the slave-trade, and were only too pleased to have it in their power to betray the whereabouts of the predatory Arabs.

As far as Fidler could understand, the slaver had been secreted by her captain and crew in a creek on the left bank of the river a little way farther up stream. The entrance was somewhat difficult to find, owing to the thick clumps of trees which overhung its waters. This fact was emphasised and explained by many clever gesticulations. Some distance beyond the creek, and on the same side of the river, was a native village, some of the inhabitants of which were friendly to the slaver's people.

Thus much, Fidder, with his natural shrewdness, understood; but he could not obtain any information as to whether the slaves in the dhow were likely to be disembarked or not. The fishermen could not be made to understand the question, nor would they undertake to act as guides, being evidently afraid of the possible consequences.

"I feel a bit more easy in my mind," said Fidder, "now that I've had a bit of a yarn with these Jim Crow niggers. Smash my top-lights if I ever thought I'd get a grip of their meaning, never having been chummy with Jews, Turks, infidels, or heretics!"

"We must shove ahead at once," exclaimed Jack, fumbling in his pockets to see if he could find any rupees with which to reward the fishermen. "There is no time to be lost if we want to prevent them disembarking the slaves."

And with that he handed over three rupees to the piscators, who salaamed reverentially, and then paddled off gaily down the river. The cutter's crew also resumed their oars with

great alacrity, as they were burning to come to close quarters with the Arabs who had evaded them so cunningly and to such good purpose.

“Long steady strokes, mates!” cried Fidler, “that’s the way to make her spin along. Small-arm men, stand by with your rifles!”

A keen look-out was kept for the entrance of the creek on the left bank. The trees were dense and the light deceptive, so it would be no easy task to discover the dhow’s hiding-place, which had doubtless been frequently used before by the astute Arabs. And it is quite possible that our friends might have overlooked it, but for an unforeseen event which betrayed the whereabouts of the slaver’s crew, and was the cause of the death of several of them.

As the Englishmen were peering about and endeavouring to find an opening which would answer to the description the fishermen had given them, they were astonished to see a broad glare shoot up into the sky far above the topmost branches of the tallest trees, on the left bank of the river; and this was almost

immediately followed by a loud sharp explosion, which echoed and re-echoed amidst the forest trees with a very remarkable effect.

Some cries and shrieks then rent the air, accompanied by a perfect tornado of shouts, and the excited jabbering of many Oriental tongues.

The cutter's crew involuntarily laid upon their oars.

"A gunpowder explosion on board the dhow, that I'll bet my Sunday hat," said Fidder emphatically; "and I reckon some of the varmints have been blown to smithereens."

"She's close to us," said Jack excitedly, "and we had better attack them at once whilst they're panic-stricken. Give way, men, I'm certain we haven't passed the entrance to a lagoon yet."

Almost immediately afterwards the opening was discovered in a dark bend of the river, which was much overhung with trees and thickly lined with mangrove bushes. The water looked shallow, but our friends knew that where the dhow had passed in they could follow with ease; and Fidder boldly steered the cutter into

the gloomy mouth of the repellant-looking creek, where scarce even a few pale flickering rays of moonlight managed to penetrate through the dense canopy of branches and creepers overhead. One or two ungainly alligators were sprawling on the mud-banks, scarcely distinguishable in the obscurity from felled trunks of trees; and the ghastly cry of the ill-omened devil-bird sounded harshly from a neighbouring brake.

The creek was very tortuous, and it was necessary for Fidler to exert all his art as a steersman to prevent the cutter running aground on the mud-banks, where she would probably have stuck hard and fast, and resisted all efforts at flotation. The water was black and deep, although the lagoon was narrow; and the oars seemed to be dipping in and out of liquid fire, so brilliant were the phosphorescent lights amidst the Stygian gloom.

The shouts and cries from the dhow's people had been hushed, and an ominous silence prevailed. Doubtless the captain had exerted his authority and quelled the disturbance, knowing

well how easily such a babel of sound might betray his whereabouts in the creek.

All his precautions were in vain, as we know. On glided the cutter, her six oars dipping deeply and with regularity into the nigrescent current, and the occupants of her stern sheets looking like figures carved out of black marble. The phosphorescent water hissed at her sharp prow, and fell away astern in a glowing line of wake which stretched away in a pale fitful manner towards the entrance of the lagoon. Every voice was hushed. Trelawny and his coxswain only exchanged remarks in low whispers. It was hoped to take the dhow's crew by surprise before they had recovered from the panic of the powder explosion.

"It looks lighter ahead," whispered the middy to his coxswain; "I think the trees are much less dense."

"You're right, sir, and the creek is a good sight wider too if I'm not mistaken. We must be close upon the F. D.'s first cousin now, and must stand by for a shindy."

The cutter swirled around a point, and found herself in a broader but shallower piece of water, more open to the heavens, but overshadowed in places by clumps of drooping palms and giant bamboos. In the centre of this pool was anchored the dhow they were in search of, looming up huge in the uncertain light. At a glance our friends in the cutter perceived that the slaver-skipper had evidently—at the time of the explosion—been in the act of landing his slaves by means of all his available boats. A large group of these poor wretches were cowering on the bank with an armed guard over them, and two boats were just upon the point of returning empty alongside the vessel—evidently for a fresh relay.

The cutter was discovered in an instant! It was impossible to effect a surprise under the circumstances. It only remained for the Englishmen to dash on and grapple with the foe without an instant's loss of time.

As if by magic the Arabs and their detachment of slaves on shore silently melted away

into the bush and disappeared from sight. In spite of his excitement, young Trelawny did not fail to notice this.

Menacing shouts and vindictive cries of anger arose from the dhow as the cutter dashed at her across the pool, and loud above all rang out the shrill orders of some one in authority.

The bluejackets answered this warlike chorus with a hearty British cheer. The oarsmen bent their sturdy backs with a will, and the small arm men stood by to pour in a volley if necessary.

Jets of flame gushed from the dhow's heavy old-fashioned stern, and some slugs whizzed over our friends' heads with an ominous *ping-ping*.

"Fire!" shouted Jack in his loudest tones. "Stand by with your boathooks forward there!"

The rifles flashed out an angry response. There was no time to reload, for the cutter was almost alongside her huge antagonist, which looked little injured by the explosion. Just as she crashed alongside, several shots were fired at the seamen at point-blank range, and one man

fell down in the boat mortally wounded in the lungs by an Arab bullet.

“On board, lads!” yelled Fiddler, in stentorian tones, as he drew his revolver from his belt, and prepared to scramble up the dhow’s side.

Jack also had his revolver ready, and in a moment had swung himself over the bulwarks of the enemy, followed by his determined crew.

One volley from the revolvers was enough for the Arabs, who were seized with a panic at seeing the seamen tumble over the side armed to the teeth. It was not the first time they had encountered the British bluejacket, and they had a very vivid remembrance of previous hand-to-hand scimmages.

With a loud cheer the cutter’s crew, headed by Jack and their coxswain, swept forward with a rush, driving the Arabs before them to the fore-castle, where a number of luckless slaves were collected, evidently ready to be landed in batches. Several of the dhow’s crew now sprang overboard, and struck out for the shore. Amongst them was the captain.

“We could shoot those fellows down, sir!” cried Fidler; “’twould be a pity to let them escape.”

“No, no!” cried Trelawny quite indignantly; “I won’t have them shot down in the water—it wouldn’t be fair.”

“Perhaps you’re right, sir,” said Fidler, “but for my part I’d kill ’em like so many black beetles.”

“Have these Arabs who have surrendered disarmed, Fidler,” continued the middy. “We must give them quarter, and pass stout lashings round their arms.”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

The dhow was now a prize, but Jack found to his disgust that only twenty slaves remained on board—those, in fact, who had been congregated upon the forecastle.

As soon as the prisoners had been secured, the middy took his coxswain aside.

“Fidler,” he said, “we must make an effort to release those other poor slaves on shore. I can’t bear to think of their awful doom if we

leave them in the hands of these cruel and bloodthirsty slave-hunters."

"Spoken like a brave young gentleman," said the seaman approvingly. "I was going to suggest to you that we should follow up on the varmints' trail. 'Twas a mighty easy job to carry this dhow, and I reckon we've now got the slaver's people pretty well in dread of us, and if we look slippery, can overhaul the shore-going gang in a very short time and smash 'em up."

"I do hope we'll manage it," said Jack, his eyes flashing in the moonlight; "I feel that we've only half accomplished our duty. The important thing is to liberate the slaves, not to capture the dhow."

The cutter's crew were quite ready for a fresh adventure, for they considered the late skirmish a very tame affair indeed, in spite of the death of their unfortunate comrade, whose body was reverentially carried on board the dhow, and covered with a boat flag. All the rest of the party had gone quite unscathed, owing to the

resolute way they had overborne all resistance.

Three seamen, armed with loaded rifles and revolvers, were left in charge of the dhow, with strict orders to shoot any of the Arabs who should prove troublesome. Taking the remaining six men with them, Jack and Fidder sprang into the cutter and pushed for the shore. There was now no sign of the Arabs who had so recklessly sprung overboard rather than surrender to their hated white foes. The middy shuddered as the thought crossed his mind that some of them might have been killed by the voracious alligators that evidently infested the creek.

"I thought the dhow would have been a bit knocked to pieces by that there explosion," said Fidder, as he steered for the bank where the slaves had been landed; "but there was precious little damage done, and I could only see two Arab corpses what was mutilated by it."

"There may have been more victims that we know nothing about," said the middy, "but

I'm glad the dhow wasn't badly injured, or we couldn't have towed her out to the *Snarler*."

The cutter now ran alongside the bank, and the men—with the exception of the boat-keepers—leaped out. There was no sign of the enemy.

"Let one man scull the boat back to the dhow," suggested Fidler; "we shall want every mother's son for this job, for it's just occurred to me that we may find we have to deal with shore-going ruffians as well as the slaver's people."

"We shall give them all a good drubbing!" exclaimed Jack, with all the impetuosity of a boy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FINAL SCRIMMAGE.



ALTHOUGH it was rather dark upon the bank of the creek, it was not difficult to find the trail of the fleeing Arabs and their slaves, for a beaten track revealed itself winding away amidst the boles of the tall forest trees, and fairly clear of obstructions. There could be no doubt that this path had been utilised by the retreating enemy, and that they had known of its existence beforehand, which accounted for the marvellous celerity of their disappearance.

“Forward, men!” shouted Jack Trelawny, tightening his sword-belt. “We can’t be far behind the Arabs who swam off from the dhow.”

The little party set off at a brisk pace, keeping their rifles ready cocked, for they knew that at any moment they might become engaged with

ambushed bodies of the enemy, although Fidler gave it as his opinion that the Arabs would not have the pluck to carry out such a manœuvre.

“’Tis my opinion,” he said to Jack, “that the beggars are beating a retreat to the village of which the fishermen spoke, and where their pals hang out, as sure as eggs are eggs. Ah, they tipped us a wrinkle and no mistake, did those jolly chaps; and I wouldn’t mind buying their fish from them at a handsome price.”

The path our friends were following was gloomy in the extreme, the moonlight being excluded by the dense inwoven branches of the trees. An active enemy might have harassed them terribly, or even annihilated them, whilst passing through these sombre jungle labyrinths; but the Arabs had other plans in view, as they were extremely anxious to prevent the slaves falling into the bluejackets’ hands, and intended to distribute them amongst their friends in the neighbouring village. Thus Fidler’s conjecture turned out to be a true one.

Though Jack Trelawny and his party were all

fleet of foot and possessed of sound lungs, they were no match for the Arabs in running, and this they soon discovered to their cost. Natives of the East are lithe, sparcely built men, who can cover the ground at an extraordinary pace; and the very scanty raiment they wear is also to their advantage. The Arabs were no exception to the rule, and, moreover, terror lent wings to their feet, for they did not feel at all sure as to what dire fate might await them should they be so unlucky as to fall into the seamen's hands.

The reader will not be surprised to learn, therefore, that our friends of the *Snarler* were unsuccessful in their pursuit of the enemy. It was a fact unpalatable to them all, but facts are stubborn things that have to be dealt with, and it's no good trying to ignore them.

After following the spoor of the natives steadily for over a mile through the forest, Jack and his friends saw light ahead through the trunks of the trees—the pale struggling light of early dawn. In another moment they had emerged from the jungle, and found themselves

in the close proximity of a large native village. At a sign from their midshipman the seamen halted. Not a sound arose from the village save the occasional bark of the pariah dog, or the crow of some energetic chanticler, who was proud of having arisen so long before the sun. As for the inhabitants, they all appeared to be buried in the profoundest slumbers. And where were the Arabs and their scores of black slaves?

“Well, I’m jiggered if this ain’t a rum start!” said Fidler, in astonished tones. “Was there ever such a cunning serpent as a nigger!”

“What are we to do now?” asked Jack doubtfully, “I don’t like to attack the village.”

“Reconnoitre,” answered Fidler laconically.

The advice was undoubtedly good.

The whole party moved forward stealthily and in good order towards the village, keeping their weapons ready for use, and their eyes intently fixed upon the native huts. There was a banana grove just on the outskirts of the settlement, and to this sheltered point of observation Jack and Fidler led their small party of followers.

Around the village was a grass veldt, studded here and there with clumps of fruit trees, and in places cultivated with yams, sweet-potatoes, and pumpkins. The houses of the natives were rude daub-and-wattle huts, thatched with palm-leaves or dried grass.

"I'm afraid the pariah dogs will betray us," whispered Fidder, as the party halted amongst the banana trees; "the brutes sleep with one eye open."

"Dawn is beginning to break, and the natives will soon be astir, pariahs or no pariahs," said Jack, in the same low tone.

"I wonder if I could loot a nice young sucking-pig here," said the coxswain, in a musing tone; "I'm mighty partial to them when they're in season."

Suddenly one of the bluejackets darted forward, and seized a native by the throat who had been lying concealed behind one of the thickest banana trees. The man could not utter a sound, so tightly was his windpipe compressed, and he looked a perfect picture of

abject terror as his captor dragged him out into the light for inspection.

“He’s one of them vile Arabs!” cried Fidler, clapping the cold barrel of a revolver to the fellow’s head. “I’d like to blow his brains out.”

“You’ll disturb the whole village if you do,” said Jack, laying a hand on his coxswain’s arm.

“Bless your heart, sir, I only want to frighten him,” answered Fidler. “I want to get some information out of the wretch, if ’tis possible.”

The seaman was wrong about the nationality of the prisoner, for he was a native of the village sent out by the Arabs to act as a spy, and bring them information about the Englishmen’s movements. The tables were now turned upon him, and by dint of terrible threats Fidler wrung from him the intelligence—chiefly by means of signs—that the Arab slave-dealers were in reality hiding in the village, and that the slaves were impounded in a large kind of barn or empty storehouse at the farther end of the village.

Our friends held a hurried council of war.

“If this fellow’s information is true,” observed

Jack, "we may have to fight our way right through the village, unless we can make a *détour* and avoid going through the streets. I don't believe for a moment that the inhabitants are all asleep. They *must* know what has been going on around them."

"Our prisoner must guide us to this slave-barracoon or whatever it is," said Fidler decisively; "I think my revolver held to his head all the way will act as a gentle reminder that he had better not betray us! We'll avoid the village, sir, as you suggest, and skirt them fields of yams yonder, which I think will take us as short a way as any."

Every one having agreed to this plan, the little party moved forward rapidly but silently; Fidler marching in front, with his pistol at the terrified prisoner's temples.

Jack fancied he could discern in the dim light the large building in which the unhappy slaves were confined. It stood upon a slope of rising ground, just beyond the outskirts of the village upon the opposite side.



Fidder walked in front with his pistol at the terrified prisoner's temples.
THE BROTHER MIDDIES, page 166.

Lovely primrose tints were spreading over the Eastern heavens. The moon and stars were paling fast, and the morning twilight was about to slowly vanish before the onward march of the victorious orb of day. In the ordinary course of events, the natives would have been ere this astir in preparation for their day's avocations. The silence that prevailed could only be assumed—of that Jack Trelawny felt certain.

Already the pariah dogs were alarmed by the proximity of strangers, and were baying and yelping with great energy, whilst the cocks crew long and persistently as if to summon their owners from the gloom and dirt of their badly-ventilated huts.

As our friends skirted the unsavoury village, a dropping fire was suddenly opened upon them from one or two of the shanties near which they were passing. At the same moment the guide made a daring attempt to escape by throwing off Fidler's grasp and darting off for the shelter of some neighbouring trees. The coxswain, however, promptly levelled his revolver, and

shot the runaway straight through the head—the victim falling stone dead into a large clump of tambooki grass.

“I know which the building is, lads. Follow me!” cried Jack. “Reserve your ammunition for closer quarters.”

Away went the party helter-skelter in the wake of their midshipman, laughing boisterously as if the whole thing was a very good joke.

The whole village was now in a prodigious uproar. The shouts and shrieks of the men, the screams of the women, the squalling of the children, the bleating of goats, and the baying of dogs, combined in a truly hideous babel of sound, which if brave men could be cowed by noise might have caused our friends to beat a hasty retreat from what they might have been pardoned for believing to be pandemonium broken loose. It was fortunate that firearms seemed to be scarce in the village, for nothing like a persistent fire was kept up from the huts, and the slugs flew wildly in various directions without doing any harm.

Suddenly the roll of a war-drum boomed out on the clear morning air, and this seemed to have the effect of lessening the hubbub.

“Their tom-toms won’t frighten me!” exclaimed Fidler contemptuously. “I’ll put my foot through their bossiest war-drum a bit later on, or I’m a Dutchman.”

At one house nearly at the farthest extremity of the village, a rather warm fire was opened upon our friends, and one of the bluejackets was wounded in the shoulder by a bullet.

“I’m sure that some of those rascally Arabs are in that house!” exclaimed Jack, as he halted to survey it. “Charge forward, men, and take it by storm as a lesson to them!”

The seamen swept eagerly towards the building, which was only about fifty yards distant from them—our hero and Fidler at their head. From the doorways, and every available aperture, muskets blazed out as the seamen approached, but the latter were never checked in their advance, and in a few moments had gallantly rushed the building. A short, desperate scrimmage ensued

with half-a-dozen Arabs and an equal number of villagers, but the latter became demoralised by the hand-to-hand encounter, and quickly beat a retreat by the back door, leaving three of their number dead upon the floor of the shanty. In this affray Fidler was wounded in the neck by a spear, but the hurt was not a serious one.

After having refreshed themselves with the contents of some cocoa-nuts, which they found piled in a corner of the hut, our friends again set out in search of the slave-barracoon. Jack led the way with unerring precision, for he had a fine bump of locality, and in a few minutes the little party of seamen arrived in sight of it without having been farther molested by the enemy. It was evident what the roll of the war-drum had signified. The barracoon was surrounded by armed Arabs and a few of their allies, who seemed determined to dispute the advance of the blue-jackets, for they at once opened a brisk fire of musketry, and hurled shouts of defiance across the intervening space of about two hundred yards.

Fortunately, there were some hillocks of sand

just in front of our friends, and Jack at once ordered his men to take advantage of this cover, and to lie down and reply with their rifles to the enemy's fire. For some minutes a brisk fusilade was kept up, and the Arabs and their friends suffered heavily, for they had no cover to take refuge behind. Every shot told from the navy rifles with destructive effect, and it was soon evident that the natives were beginning to lose heart. At this critical juncture Jack leaped to his feet and called upon his men to fix cutlasses, and join him in a charge.

Like a whirlwind the seamen swept over the broken ground. Jack had his loaded revolver ready for close quarters, but there was no necessity to bring it into use. After a few hasty shots at the approaching foe, the Arabs and their satellites deemed discretion the better part of valour, and fled with the utmost precipitation, leaving their dead behind them, and even the big war-drum—which latter instrument Fidler promptly put his foot through, as he had threatened to do.

It was the work of a few moments to break

in the doors of the barracoon, and there were, at least, a hundred luckless slaves huddled together on the earthen floor, fully believing that their last hour had come. They were soon disabused of this idea, and promptly marched off in the direction of the creek, that they might be re-embarked on board the dhow; and so utterly cowed were the Arabs and the villagers by the audacious bravery of the mere handful of Englishmen, that they never ventured to interfere, and allowed the whole party to retire without even firing another shot.

Discipline and British pluck had won the day against tremendous odds.

The retreat through the jungle was expeditiously accomplished, now that it was broad daylight, and in an hour's time the slaves had been safely got on board; and the cutter, taking the dhow in tow, dropped down the river, a look-out being kept for any natives who should attempt to dispute the passage. The open sea, however, was reached in safety, and Jack found to his delight that there was a light but favourable breeze for returning to the *Snarler's*.

anchorage. Every one came on board the dhow, and it was determined to sail her back to the ship, towing the cutter astern.

“Stand by to loose the lateen sail!” sung out the middy cheerily.

“Ay, ay, sir!” responded the bluejackets, as they rushed to obey the order.

Suddenly there arose the startling cry of “Man overboard!” It came from one of the seamen who was on the lee side of the dhow. Jack Trelawny rushed to the spot.

“Who is it?” he cried. “Man the cutter, some of you smart fellows!”

“It’s one of them little slave-boys,” replied the seaman who had given the alarm; “I’ve chucked him a spar, for it seems to me as he can’t swim.”

“A shark! a shark!” now rang out in blood-curdling tones, followed by shouts of dismay from every one.

The slave-boy could be plainly seen struggling in the water some yards away, and the fin of a voracious shark could plainly be discerned as it

moved swiftly but silently in the direction of the helpless, terrified little negro, as he splashed aimlessly about in the water. It was an awful moment, and every one seemed petrified by the terrible nature of the occurrence.

But noble-hearted Jack Trelawny was quite determined that even a poor little slave-boy should not lose his life if he could prevent it. With one bound he was upon the dhow's gunwale, and from thence plunged into the sea with a dull heavy splash. Quite at home in the water, our hero quickly grasped the drowning child, and commenced swimming with him towards the cutter, which was now putting off from the dhow with several men in her. Frightened by the heavy splash, the shark had disappeared for a moment, but it quickly came to the surface again, and once more darted at the swimmers.

"Keep up one moment, sir, and you're safe!" shouted Fidler, who, armed with a boathook, was standing up in the bows of the cutter ready to beat off the shark should it have the temerity to venture near enough.

There was a convulsive lashing of the water into foam and a violent struggle ; then a shriek of agony rang out with terrible distinctness. It seemed to pierce the hearts of all who heard it.

The silver sea became dyed with crimson. Ah ! what a terrible tale that told. More dead than alive the poor little slave-boy was hauled by willing hands into the cutter, and our brave midddy-hero was also lifted in, and tenderly laid in the stern sheets by the loving hands of his devoted seamen.

Pale as the whitest marble was Jack's handsome face as it lay supported on Fiddler's arm. He was happily unconscious, but the sailors' eyes grew moist as they gazed upon the pallid features of the gallant boy, and upon his sadly mangled and mutilated lower limbs. The little negro boy had escaped, and his rescuer had become the victim—cruelly mauled by the relentless scourge of the seas.

A quarter of an hour had elapsed, and Jack Trelawny still lay upon the deck of the dhow, supported in his coxswain's arms. One of the

men, who had some knowledge of ambulance work, had done his best to stanch the flow of blood and relieve the young sufferer, who had now recovered consciousness. In a weak faint voice our hero thanked his coxswain and crew for their attention. Immediately afterwards his eye fell upon the slave-boy—to save whose life he was about to yield his own—and he smiled gently, and as if with an effort. Then his lips moved, and the anxious listening seamen caught the faint murmur of “Mother.”

It was his last dying breath. The eyes—those luminous dark grey eyes that his mother loved—began to glaze. There was a shudder which slightly convulsed the lithe boyish frame—and then came a terrible terrible silence, only broken by Fidler’s almost heart-broken sobs as he sadly bent over the lifeless form of one he had loved so well.

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